THE MAN NOBODY KNEW

HOLWORTHY HALL

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"And . . . and after all I've done!" he said thickly. "After all I've *said!*"

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BY

HOLWORTHY HALL

Author of "Henry of Navarre, Ohio," "Pepper," "Paprika," "What He Least Expected," "Dormie One," etc.

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TO

MARNIE AND JEAN AND JOHN

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"And . . . and after all I've done!" he said thickly. "After all I've *said!*" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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I

IN the beginning of things, he was merely a number; but even that was creditable, because his number was low enough to signify that he had responded pretty promptly to the rallying call. After that, and with the cataclysmic suddenness which marked all changes of military status on the Western front, he became, one frosty morning, a Case, and got himself roughly classified (and tenderly handled) as a Stretcher Case, a *Grand Blessé*, and, in consequence, a proper temporary inmate of a field hospital on the Belgian plains.

There, he was unofficially known as a *Joyeux*, or Joyous One; not because he displayed a very buoyant disposition — far from it! — but because he belonged to the Foreign Legion; and in the course of another day or two he was routine-ticketed as an *Evacué*, and provided with a lukewarm hot-water bottle and a couple of evil-smelling cigarettes to console him on the road to the base hospital at Neuilly.

At Neuilly he became, for the first time since his enlistment, an Individual, and at the very outset he was distinguished by certain qualities which had passed unnoticed in the frying pan and fire of the trenches. For one thing, he was obviously immune to kindness; and for another, he was apparently immune to hope. He was a man of inveterate silence; not the grim silence of fortitude in suffering (which is altogether too com-

mon a virtue in base hospitals to earn any especial merit), but rather the dogged reticence of black moods and chronic bitterness. To be sure, speech was physically difficult for him, but other men with similar misfortunes spoke blessings with their eyes, and gave back gratitude in voiceless murmurs. Not so the Joyous One. From the day of his arrival he demanded nothing, desired nothing, but to brood sullenly aloof; and so, when he became an Individual, he also became a mystery to the nursing staff. It was rumoured that he was an implacable woman hater, and there seemed to be something in it.

The wound in his knee was healing admirably; the bullet wound in his right forearm was inconvenient rather than dangerous; and as for his third and by far the most serious of his injuries — a glancing drift of shrapnel across his face — the surgeons had promised faithfully to nullify it in due time. But in spite of their professional optimism, and regardless of the care of the American nurses (all hoveringly attentive to one of their own nation who had fought for France), his spirit remained abysmal, and clouded in gloom. Only twice, in the initial month of his confinement, did he betray the weakness of an ordinary emotion; on each occasion a gold-laced general had come to salute, in the name of the Republic, one of the Individual's neighbours, and to deliver a bit of bronze which dangled from a ribbon striped red and green. It was said (and doubted by those who hadn't seen it) that at these ceremonies the Individual had grown feverish, and let tears come to his eyes, but subsequently he had relapsed into still greater depths of stoicism than before; his own bed-jacket was innocent of cross or medal, and his

depression was apparent, and acute. The nurses, arguing that perhaps his pride was wounded as seriously as his flesh, offered quick condolence, and got themselves rebuffed with shrugs of the Individual's shoulders, and inarticulate sounds which had all the earmarks of suppressed profanity. He didn't even soften when Pierre Dutout, a hard-hit Territorial in the next bed, squandered a day's supply of energy to lean across and whisper sympathetically to him: "Old man . . . *Vieux espèce de choux-croute* . . . I know how it is . . . and I haven't got any friends either. I want you to take my *Croix de Guerre*. . . . When I go nowhere."

Nor did he waver in his flintlike isolation when Dutout, one sunny morning, struggled half erect and gave the world the last of his countless smiles, and said, quite distinctly: "*Le moment s'approche . . . liberté . . . egalité . . . fraternité . . . et vive la France!*" And died, still smiling — and still unthanked — trying to unpin the war cross he thought would please his melancholy neighbour.

Liberty! — and the Individual chafed in the hard-won liberty of his soul. Equality! — and he had shared the ideals of all civilization, and the privilege of defending them with all his might. Fraternity! — and if he had never sensed the warmth of it before, he had its glowing proof in Pierre Dutout, and in the corps of altruists and angels who had daily ministered to them both; and yet, even when speech returned to him, he was a man of curt responses and stinging monosyllables — a problem to the surgeons, a problem to the nurses and (if the expression in his eyes meant anything), an overwhelming problem to himself. It

appeared that, after all, it wasn't simply women that he hated — it was the universe.

His military book implied that he had no parents, no close relations, no friends to notify, no fixed abode. He received no visitors, no letters, no packages freighted with magical delight. But to those who pitied him in all his loneliness, he was utterly contemptuous; he even went so far as to fillip sidelong to the floor a religious postcard tendered him by a devout and sentimental passer-by, and he did it in her presence, unashamed. Later, when a smiling orderly picked up that postcard, and tucked it under his pillow, he was no less contemptuous in permitting it to remain. But the one stupendous fact which, more than all else combined, made him an object of bewildered curiosity was this — that of the scores and scores of men with head-wounds who were reborn at Neuilly that spring and summer, he was the only one who had never asked for a mirror.

This, of itself, wouldn't have been astonishing as long as he delayed in the preliminary stage of recovery, for now and then a man with head-wounds proves to be super-sensitive; but in the second stage it was remarkable, and in the third stage it was unique. The staff held it to be extraordinary from a social as well as from a pathological viewpoint, that a man so terribly disfigured should have no interest — not even a morbid interest — in his own appearance. And it wasn't that the Individual was simply indifferent to the mirror; on the contrary, his aversion to it was active and energetic; he flinched, and motioned it frantically away as though the mere conception of seeing himself as

others saw him was too repellent, and too unthinkable to endure. At first, they fancied that he might have picked up, during some phase of his delirium, one of those unexplainable illusions which attach themselves to wandering minds, and by gentle advances they tried to educate him. Later on, when they realized that his actions were quite intentional and sane, they stopped the advances, except for an occasional trial or two to discover if the puzzling inhibition had yet left him. Eventually — and this was as soon as he could speak with clearness — they discontinued all experiments, and let him be as unusual as he pleased. They only watched him, wondering when a normal itch of self-conceit would take effect upon him. They watched the moon around, and then they forgot. He had never relented; and even angels in women's clothing are likely to pay the most of their attention to people who meet them half way.

There came a day in April when a photograph was requested of him. Surely he knew where there was a likeness of himself, didn't he? His old passport photograph, which had mysteriously disappeared, or —

The Individual glanced up from his present task; the wound in his arm was still annoying, and he was absorbed in learning to write with his left hand.

"What for?" he muttered.

"Why," said the nurse, cheerfully, "for a model. To help the surgeons. They'll take your picture for a guide and make you look almost exactly the way you did before."

The Individual from America sat up straight, so that the nurse was startled by his animation, which was

without a parallel in his local history. His breath came faster, and the pencil dropped from his thin fingers.

"*What!*" he said.

"Certainly!" The nurse spoke in the tone one uses to an ailing child. "You've known that, haven't you?"

The Individual's voice was queerly unmanageable and strained. "You mean to say they're going to make me look the way . . . *Could* they do that? *Could* they? Even *now?*"

"Why, of course," she assured him.

"You never told me that!" he said, passionately. "Why didn't you? Why couldn't you have *told* me! And here I've been . . ." He put his hands to his bandaged face, and seemed to shrink within himself. Then all at once he burst out: "Well, there's nothing to prevent . . . Then they could make me *not* look like it then, if they wanted to! Isn't that so?"

She regarded him in vast perplexity, and thought of summoning a surgeon, for the man had begun to quiver as though from shell-shock — which he hadn't undergone.

"Why, I don't understand what you mean," she said soothingly. "But if you'll just be calm and —"

The Individual gestured with fierce impatience.

"If they can do what you say, and make me look like any old thing they choose to, then what in the devil are they asking me for a photograph for?"

"Why, to *go* by," she said, helplessly. "You want to look like your old self, don't you?"

"*No, I don't!*"

The nurse gasped. His tone had been churlish, but

Shocked and horrified, she was gazing at the picture postcard he had snatched from under his pillow

the echo of it vaguely suggested triumph and relief. His symptoms had subsided . . . could it be that he actually *was* relieved? Dumfounded, she made another effort to convince him.

"But you must want to look just as nearly like —"

"Don't you suppose *I* know what I want?" he interrupted rudely.

"But haven't you a photograph, anyway, that I can —"

"No, I haven't!" he snapped, and then in the next moment a cold light flamed in his eyes, and his pupils dwindled to needle-points and he was staring up at her in miserable, cruel cynicism. Involuntarily she stepped backward, and her cheeks went scarlet. "No," he repeated, with vicious emphasis, "I haven't." It was a lie; the passport photograph was in the lining of a certain wallet, and he had hid it there for reasons of his own. But now that one great danger was definitely past, and a still further bulwark of protection offered, if the nurse spoke truth, the Individual could afford to come out from ambush. "And I don't want to look the way I did before, and what's more, I never did! But if your doctors are half as smart as they think they are, let 'em make me look like *that!* Or anything else either — *I* don't give a damn!"

Shocked and horrified, she was gazing at the picture postcard he had snatched from under his pillow and thrust upon her. It was a reproduction of a religious painting by Rembrandt. It was the radiant face of the Christ.

II

NINE O'CLOCK on a night in June — not a June evening, heavy-starred on velvet — but a furious June night, with Stygian blackness looping overhead, and Stygian water battering and boiling against the hull-plates. The wind was blowing less than half a gale, but clammy cool and threatening, out of the south-east; the head sea, slapping and spitting forth at the liner's bow, gave way reluctantly to the sturdy bulk, and rushed astern in savage impotence. The ship was dark as the night itself; blind dark, without a single ray to play the traitor. On deck, a solitary venturer hugged the rail, and apathetically watched the waves tear past.

Out of the warmth and cheer and the vitiated atmosphere of the smoking-room came Martin Harmon, big, florid, exuberant; and as the raw air reached to his lungs, he took it rapturously; his eyes sparkled, and he inhaled with prodigious gulps, revelling in the strong restorative. A heaving lift of the deck sent him lurching sidewise; he saved his balance by struggling toward the rail, when suddenly the slope was reversed, and he slipped, and slid to the barrier of safety, clutched it, and found himself at arms' length from the lonely watcher, who hadn't stirred, or even turned his head.

"Hello!" said Harmon, his surprise tinctured with easy familiarity. "Some night!" His natural voice was resonant enough to carry against the wind with scarcely an effort.

"Yes, it is." The tone of the response was curt,

so curt that Harmon instinctively leaned forward to discover what expression of countenance went with it. The night was so black that he might as well have tried to penetrate a curtain of solid fabric.

"Seen any U-boats yet?" he asked humorously.

"Not yet." The taciturn one moved a trifle away; a man less thin-skinned and less dined and wined than Harmon would probably have taken the hint, and removed himself.

"Hardly their kind of weather, anyway. . . . Been over on business, have you?"

The other man snuggled deeper into his coat. "Yes — on business."

"So've I. Wasted my time. Oh, I'm glad I've seen a bit of it, of course,— gives you something to talk about — but as for *getting* anywhere — nothing doing. *Ab*-so-lutely nothing doing! . . . How about you?"

"About the same." The taciturn passenger had vitriol on his tongue, but Harmon, clinging tight to the rail as the ship bucked heavily through the oncoming seas, was imperturbable.

"So? No luck at all?"

"None at all."

"Come over to sell something, did you?"

"No."

"Oh!" Harmon nodded his head sagely. "I'll take two guesses, and guess right the second time, maybe. Buying for somebody, then?"

"No."

Not the least disconcerted by his seven rebuffs, Harmon deliberately courted the eighth. His was an inquisitive disposition, and he never attempted to curb it — he was the sort of travelling companion who makes

kind and Christian citizens reflect upon the definition of justifiable homicide.

"What *is* your line, anyway?" he inquired, after a pause.

The other man laughed queerly.

"The first . . . if it makes so much difference to you."

"Beg pardon? I don't quite get you. You said . . ."

"I said the *first* line. I meant the first line trenches. I've been in it."

Harmon jerked his head upward in comprehension.

"Oh, I see! You mean the war! And you've been right on the spot where the fighting is? Is that a fact!"

"Yes."

"I couldn't see whether you had a uniform on, or not," said Harmon, half in apology. "But you haven't, have you? No wonder I couldn't guess . . . Jiminy, but it's getting nasty out here, isn't it? . . . Where were you?"

"Flanders."

"Is that so? Pretty lively up there, isn't it? Something stirring most all the time?"

"I imagine so." The other man's accent was amazingly diffident, and Harmon peered at him, incredulous.

"Good Lord, don't you know?"

"Not a great deal. I happened to get hit the first day I was in the trenches."

"Really? That's an odd one! When was that?"

"Sixteen months ago."

"But you got in it again afterwards, I suppose? I'll bet you did!"

"No."

"What! You never got back at all? Just one day, and you're *through?*"

"Yes. After I was discharged from hospital, I was discharged from the army, too. Permanently unfit."

"English Army?"

"No — French."

"Well, that's some record!" said Harmon appreciatively. "I . . . Look out! Duck your head, son! Say, that was a he-wave, wasn't it? Well — you got hit the first day, and it was all over! That certainly is some record! Not to say tough luck — the toughest kind. Never heard of anything like it, or anywhere *near* like it. Going back home, I take it?"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

Harmon ignored the sarcasm.

"Back to work, eh? What did you say your line is?"

"I didn't say. I haven't any just now."

Harmon pondered a second.

"Oh! Gentleman of leisure? Soldier of fortune, eh? That's how you happened to get into it? Gad! If I were fifteen years younger myself —"

The young man's dignity was superb. "Not exactly that, either. And if you'll be so good as to tell me —"

Harmon laughed with abandon; the conversation had become very near to a conflict of wills, and he loved to get what he started after. Also, he was sufficiently mellowed to consider the interview in the light of comedy.

"Oh! don't get excited! People interest me. Only way to live — make friends as you go along. I always like to hear what the other fellow has to say for

himself. That's how to get the best slant on life in general."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir! And it don't take me such a terrible long time to size up a man, either. Sort of a knack — it comes by itself. Now take you, for instance; know what I make out of you? I'd take a chance off-hand — just from what you've said and the way you've said it — that you might be a young man who's sacrificed a good deal to get over there, and you thought you'd get some glory and hurrah-boys out of it, and then you had all that tough luck, and now you're sort of worrying about what's waiting for you behind the Statue of Liberty. You don't know exactly whether you're afoot or horseback. That's all. Well, now — Am I right, or am I wrong?"

The young man lifted his shoulders.

"Go ahead — if it pleases you."

"Well, it *does*. Come pretty near hitting the nail on the head, didn't I? Custom of mine. Comes in handy in my business . . . Well, I wouldn't worry if I were you. You're disappointed; *that's* natural . . . but the world hasn't come to an end yet. Of course, it *is* something like a come-down to leave the army, and get into harness again, but after all, there's plenty of excitement right in the United States. Big work to be done, son! Big money to make. And it helps the war along, too. I tell you, there never was a bigger opportunity to make money than there is right this minute. Business is big, and profits are big, and they're going to get bigger and bigger all the time . . . the hard job isn't to find the scheme, it's to find the

men to run it. Don't *you* worry . . . you'll land something right off the bat!"

"Thanks for the compliment!"

"Oh, it's no compliment! *Any*body can make money these days. It's a plain statement of fact . . . Say, don't you think the wind's getting a bit too breezy? Let's go in and *have* something."

"I don't think so — thank you."

Harmon took him firmly by the arm.

"Oh, yes, you will. What you need is to be braced up. Don't hang around and grouch at everything; come in and be sociable. What you want's a drink. Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Well —"

"And that's what the doctor ordered! Come on! It's on me."

The other man hesitated, and at last succumbed, out of sheer unconcern, to a companionship he realized in advance would be distasteful . . . but tonight it was better than nothing, especially since the talkative person had volunteered to buy.

"All right," he consented briefly; and together, arm-in-arm, they stumbled and tacked across the treacherous deck, and presently crossed the threshold into the hazy light of the smoking room. A small table in the corner was unoccupied; they made for it, and dropped into opposite chairs. Harmon, smiling broadly, wiped the brine from his smarting eyes.

"Now then," he said, "what particular brand of poison do you —" And broke off short, and stared, fascinated, at the extraordinary young man in front of him.

He was anywhere from twenty-five to forty, this American from the distant trenches, and his age was as hard to guess as a clever woman's; there was something about him peculiar to youth and yet, when his face was in repose, he might easily have claimed two score of years, and gone undisputed. It was a face which suggested both the fire of immaturity, and the drain of experience; there was breath-taking gravity about it, a hint of the dignity of marble, of ageless permanence. It was a slightly thin face, scarred by a heavy line or two, and indelibly stamped with the evidence of intense thought, and inward suffering; but it lacked the hollows which, at the first glance, should have supported the evidence. It was a thin and oval face, with a mouth of large and sympathetic sweetness; a forehead white and high; a prominent, delicate nose; and irises of clear, luminous gray. It wasn't altogether an Anglo-Saxon type of countenance, nor was it definitely European; it seemed rather to have taken all the better qualities from several races. It was a face to inspire immediate trust, and confidence, and respect, and Harmon, despite his lack of practice in all three of these reactions, was evidently attracted by it. Unwittingly, he sat up straighter; and he comprehended, without going very far in the way of analysis, that he had run across a person worth remembering.

"Vichy-Célestins for me," said the old-young man, indifferently.

"I'll . . . I guess I'll have vichy, too," said Harmon, relaxing. His assurance slowly returned; nevertheless, as he continued to study his remarkable guest, he dropped a fraction of his familiarity. "If it wasn't for something I can't just describe, I'd say . . . well,

never mind. Er . . . what business *have* you been in, by the way?"

The younger man's reply was tardy, and not particularly gracious.

"Why, the longest time I ever put in at any one business was selling insurance. The last thing I did was to sell bonds. Why?"

Harmon stiffened. "A salesman! Good Lord! That's the last thing in the world I'd have . . . but, say! You must have been a whirlwind!"

The younger man's calmness under flattery was disconcerting. Indeed, his lips twitched as though he were mentally charging off the whole account.

"What makes you think that!"

"Why, there's only two kinds of men that make good in insurance: the aggressive devils and the persuasive ones. And dealing with women — and older men . . . the way you have to, Lord, what an asset you've got!" He motioned towards himself. "And in *my* line . . . why, a man with a presence like yours would hardly have to open his mouth! You've got a sort of . . . I'll be hanged if I know what to call it . . . but a kind of *feeling*, if you know what I mean. Salesman! Why, all *you* need is an introduction and a dotted line!"

The young man laughed, rather forlornly, and sipped his vichy.

"Just at present, I haven't either."

Harmon's gaze was unfaltering, and his interest and admiration bounded higher. Mechanically, in accordance with his habits, he was striving to discover how this new acquaintance might be put to practical use. "Was I right, or was I wrong? Playing in hard

luck don't strengthen a man's courage much, even if he tries to bluff himself into thinking it does. I didn't say that getting *licked* every once in a while isn't a good thing for a man; I said 'hard luck.' I sort of imagine you've had a big dose of it, lately. Not just getting hurt, but all along the line. Right?"

The young man nodded slightly. "Somewhat."

"You understand I'm not trying to poke into your private affairs, but —"

"Still," said the young man, his lips twitching again, "I owe you something for your hospitality — and the only currency I've got about me is information."

"Don't feel any obligation! Pleasure, I assure you . . . Now, to get back to the mutton, as the French say . . . you better cheer up and start thinking about the future. Cut out the regret stuff; that's *my* advice, and you can take it or leave it. Forget all that tough luck you had over here, and get busy figuring out how you're going to cash in on all your experience. That's *my* policy — capitalize your bad luck. *Get* something out of it." He beamed, like a reformer in the presence of one to be reformed. "America's full of chances — you'll land something big in no time. Can't help it if you try. *Salesman!* Son, you're carrying your best recommendation right on top of your own shoulders!"

The young man gave him back a wry smile, and finished his vichy.

"I only hope it comes true," he said.

Harmon looked at him steadily, and falling under the spell of those radiant features, stared and stared until he came to himself, and all at once brought his

fist down on the table, so that the glasses rang again.

"Well, why shouldn't it? As a matter of fact, why *shouldn't* it?"

The younger man's expression hadn't changed. "Meaning what?"

"Meaning," said Harmon, deliberately, "that the first thing I've got to do when I get home is to hunt up a couple of good salesmen myself. I said that before, didn't I? No? It's a fact, anyhow. Well — are you hunting for a good job, or aren't you?" His manner, — considering that a moment ago he had pounded the table — was elaborately casual. It was as though an inspiration had seized him, and now he wanted to hide it pending further developments.

"Aren't you a little hasty?" The young man's intonation was sardonic.

"I've cleaned up most of my money," said Harmon, very slowly to the ceiling, "by making quick decisions. I make up my mind pretty fast. I like old Bob Fitzsimmons' rule for fighting — he said the place to hit from is wherever your hand is . . . Well, if you can interest *me* on short notice, you can interest other people. Mind you, we're just discussing this — sort of thinking out loud. No obligation on either side. Doesn't do any harm to talk about it, does it?"

"Then suppose," said the young man placidly, "you define your idea of a good job. I'm rather particular."

"How's that? Are you in any position to be particular?"

"Certainly. I am."

"But you admit you're out of luck, and —"

"But you admit I'm a whirlwind." The young man smiled with faint amusement.

"I said you *ought* to be — with training."

"Did you mention the training part of it."

"No, but that was understood."

"Oh! Who understood it?"

"Why, *I* did. Because if you *had* been as good as you ought to be, you wouldn't have anything to worry about now you're coming back, would you? Am I right, or am I wrong?"

The young man's mouth turned upwards at the corners.

"Go ahead and describe the job."

Harmon never ceased to study him.

"Well, my idea of a pretty sweet job for a man of your age is — to start, of course — about twenty a week, and commissions."

"Yes? What percent commission?"

"Oh! eight to ten percent."

The young man glanced at Harmon, and laughed quietly.

"You're a broker, of course, but that doesn't sound much like conservative investment securities to *me*. What is it — industrials?"

Harmon grimaced.

"Yes, I'm a broker." He set down his glass and fumbled for a card. "There! But I was thinking more about stocks than bonds. Some new Montana properties — copper and zinc. Metals are the big noise these days. I guess you realize that, don't you? Munition work. Copper's close to thirty cents now, and when you went across, it must have been about twelve."

The younger man glanced at the card. "My name is Hilliard. Well — is competition so keen you can af-

ford to pay that high for business, or is the stuff just hard to sell?"

Harmon, who had begun to nod assent to the first question, looked rather blank at the second, but rallied quickly.

"Competition. But there's money in it, and you'll get your share of it, too — believe *me!*"

"*I?* Aren't you taking my part of it pretty much for granted?"

The stout man spoke with telling gravity and caution.

"I'm trying to get an angle on you. I've got a sneaking suspicion that you and I can do business together. Want to consider it?"

"All this on such short acquaintance? Aren't you taking a fearful chance?"

Harmon saw that the young man's irises were extremely luminous and clear; he leaned forward seriously. "I'm simply backing my hunch, son. In the long run, it pays me — pays me well. I've sort of taken a fancy to you — for one thing you don't tell all you know to any stranger that happens to come along. That's a good sign, *provided* you can loosen up when the time comes, and I've got an idea you can. Now, as far as I know, you may be the rottenest salesman in the whole United States; I wouldn't hire your *experience* without some references and maybe a surety company back of you; but I'd hire that face of yours, and your manner, and your voice, offhand. I'd hire your *front* — not your past! And let me tell you right now, son, I never made a trade as fast as this before in my life. But there's something about you that . . . well, to be specific, I'm thinking of a pet list of prospects I've got. I'd guarantee you could go out and sell one out of every

five people on it if you didn't even remember to tell 'em the name of the mine. Sell 'em on your front — your approach. *Provided* you can loosen up and talk when the time comes . . . Well?"

The young man was thoughtful, and unblinking.

"You're actually making me a proposition, are you?"

"Absolutely," Harmon's fist on the table provided the exclamation point. "Here — I don't know you, and you don't know me, but if you're hunting for a job, you've found it. . . . It's your next move."

The young man's lips parted in grave humour; Harmon was spellbound at the effect.

"I'll try not to keep you waiting. This speed of yours rather entices me. Besides, if my face is my fortune, I'd better find it out as soon as possible. This organization of yours is in New York City, isn't it?"

"My headquarters are, but I'd want you to work outside. I've got one special town in mind — up the state. That's where this list is. It's always been one of our hardest markets, and it's got money to burn. Can't swing it somehow — they don't respond to any ordinary selling-talk, they're too hide-bound conservative. *You* know the kind. Government-bond crowd. And for a year or so they've been making war profits till you can't see 'em for dust. Manufacturing town. And I'd like mighty well to ship you up there for a month or two; give you time enough to get your bearings; and turn you loose. You ought to do great work in a place like that — forget the cut-and-dried methods, and sell your personality. You'd have a lot of magnetism if you let yourself go — I can see that without half trying. They *need* a chap like you —

Confound it!" He halted abruptly, and shook his head in great bewilderment. "I can't make it out at all! You've got the appearance of a . . . well, a sort of a strait-laced youngster, if you know what I mean, and yet the way you *say* things, I —"

The young man gestured blandly.

"And the town you have in mind?"

"It's Syracuse, New York."

"Syracuse?" The young man's chin was squared by a ruler, and noticeably thrust forward.

"Yes; know anybody there?"

Hilliard laughed unpleasantly, and resumed his former attitude.

"Why, it so happens," he said, biting the words off sharply, "that I was born and brought up in Syracuse, and if there's any one place in the world I care less about than any other place, that's the one . . . I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we're at cross-purposes from here on."

Harmon showed his vexation. "What's the matter? Haven't you kept on good terms with your old friends?"

"No."

Harmon frowned.

"Well, is it so bad you couldn't do any business there? How do they remember you?"

The young man regarded him stonily for an instant; then gradually a far-away expression crept into his eyes; he started; and caught his breath.

"I'll let you judge for yourself." He brought out a flat leather wallet, from which he extracted a tiny photograph, torn from an old passport. "What do you think of that?"

Harmon scanned it superficially.

"Nice looking boy. Who is he?"

"It was taken about two years ago," said Hilliard, resting his elbows on the table. "You wanted to know how they remember me, so I'm showing you. That's a photograph of me — taken two years ago."

"Impossible!" Harmon snorted it. "That doesn't look any more like you than . . . than *I* do! Let's omit the comedy; I'm talking business!"

The young man's mouth curled. "Don't be mistaken, Mr. Harmon — there's very little joking in me when I ever mention Syracuse." Harmon shivered at the tone, but waved the photograph in scoffing accusation.

"You're not trying to sit there and tell me —"

"I told you I was in hospital for nearly a year, I believe," said Hilliard icily. "It was shrapnel — across the face. As a matter of fact, I didn't have much of any face left. Oh — I'll spare you the details — don't worry." Harmon had turned white. "But the surgeons — they're pretty clever. Yes — they're clever!" Hilliard's eyes were needle-points. "They've got so they can take almost any old kind of foundation, and build up on it. They make a man over from his own photograph. In my own case, I preferred it differently. So when they asked me for something to use as a pattern in remodelling *me*, I gave 'em this!" He tossed out a picture postcard, soiled and frayed. "Well, that's where the trouble began. They cursed me up and down for a . . . still, that part of it won't interest *you!*" His eyes were blazing now, and his voice shook with passion. "Naturally, I hadn't meant it as damned literal as all that . . . but they had

me under ether before I could help myself . . . and they went through with it . . . and cursed me some more afterwards. . . . They couldn't copy it exactly, of course, but they did the best they could. . . . Gloated over it! Took infinite pains to make it perfect . . . and sneered at me while they did it! Sneered — and laughed. Not when they thought I could hear, but to themselves! Laughed, and then stopped laughing, and called me things that gentlemen don't say. . . . Well, you've got the results in front of you. That's what I was — and that's what I am! What's your opinion *now?*" The last sentence came snarling through set teeth.

The broker's respiration had quickened, and horror was tugging at his hair-roots. His pupils had dilated grossly; his eyes wandered vacantly from the photograph to the postcard and back to Hilliard's face. His whole imagination was pinned down and crushed; he swore softly under his breath, and wet his lips.

"It's a . . . a miracle!" he stammered. "A miracle! . . ."

"The photograph," said Hilliard harshly, "is the way they remember me up in Syracuse. Do you think they'd ever recognize me *now?*"

"It's a miracle . . . it's paralysing! . . ." Harmon swallowed hard, and looked down almost fearfully at the time-worn postcard. "There's so much difference, . . . nobody'd ever think of it without knowing . . . but when you see the original . . . ! It . . . it knocks me all in a heap! It's staggering! And they did *that* to you! Good God! Just to think they *could* do that to you! . . . I've got to have a drink!"

Hilliard motioned impatiently, but his fit of rage was slowly going down.

"There's no miracle about it at all. It was good plastic surgery. If they'd sent me out looking as I used to, you wouldn't call it a miracle, would you? No. It's only what they *did* do that makes it staggering. But it's clever — oh, yes,— clever! Hellishly clever! And you can see for yourself how few marks of it there are." He drew a long breath, and managed to smile again; but the effect was shocking, for while his features were composed and kindly, his eyes were venomous. "Well, I certainly never intended to go to Syracuse again for pleasure, but if there's enough compensation to pay for the risk, I'm not afraid to try it on . . . business." His accent sent cold chills coursing up and down Harmon's spine. "In fact, now that I think of it, it ought to be rather . . . amusing!"

The broker was striving to pull himself together.

"But why on earth didn't you have 'em use your own picture for a copy . . . if they're as clever as . . . Oh!" He stopped short, and his chin dropped. "Oh! Is *that* the answer."

"Yes," said Hilliard, reclaiming the two photographs. "That's the answer. I didn't mind starting over again, only —" He sighed and inhaled mightily. "Only take my advice, Mr. Harmon, and don't lose your temper just before an operation."

Harmon breathed more freely, but he was still in violent intellectual distress. His round face was vapid with awe, and he was tongueing his lips in constant nervousness, for the complete possibility of the situation was creeping over him.

"If that's the case," he ventured, "why . . . they surely needn't recognize your name either, Mr. Hilliard, need they? I mean, if you had any idea of going back to your home town incognito, as it were —"

"They wouldn't recognize anything about me," said Hilliard dryly. His teeth, showing at the moment, were white and regular as a young wolf's. "We won't discuss that side of it just now, though. But if I go back, I'm incognito — and don't make any mistake about it. That's what appeals to me — that's why I'm listening to you. Is that quite clear?"

Harmon swallowed again.

"They'd recognize your voice, wouldn't they?"

"I had to get used to this one myself. Something went wrong with my vocal chords, and the antrum on both sides was hurt; it seemed to have an effect like changing a sounding-board."

"So! And you used to be fatter in the face, didn't you? How about your general size, and so on?"

"I've taken on twenty-five pounds; my face *is* a lot thinner, but there's a reason. It hasn't grown on me; it was manufactured. Incidentally, while I think of it my stride's shortened six inches. That's another identification gone. Bullet in my knee. I don't exactly limp, but—"

Harmon was beaming now, and flushed with excitement.

"That's great! Oh! that's wonderful! *Wonderful!* Nobody'll know you from Adam! Thunder and lightning, what a chance — what a chance! Hold on — how well do *you* know the big men in Syracuse? Well enough to know what their weak points are? Well enough to know how to approach 'em? Know

Cullen? Know the Durants? Know Embree and McEachern and Cooke? Know —"

"At one time," said Hilliard, with sudden tragedy in his eyes, "all those people you've just named were about the closest friends I had in the world."

"Well, if you've got nerve enough to try to pass yourself off as a *stranger*, why —"

"Just a moment!" The young man's gesture, although calm, was nevertheless commanding. "Is that a genuine offer you made me a while ago?"

"It's as good as gold until you turn it down. And if you're willing to go up there, and —"

"That'll do. Now listen! I lived in Syracuse twenty-six years! If I ever had any friends there I've lost 'em now. I —"

"Whose fault was it?"

"Whose fault? Don't make me laugh!"

"Not yours, then?"

"Partly — not altogether. That isn't the point."

"Not a question of money, was it?"

"Not that — thank the Lord!"

"Booze?"

"Why —" Hilliard's pupils were concentrated. "That's immaterial. The point is that my friends and I aren't on speaking terms."

"Go ahead," said Harmon, satisfied. "Do they know you went to France?"

"They don't know anything. I left between two days, I've never written anybody so much as a line to tell where I was, or what I was doing. I went over on a tramp. A French lieutenant got me into the Army, and I didn't give a damn whether I got killed or not — and then I got this." His hand was on his

cheek, where a long scar crossed it. "And for over a year I've been hoping that somehow, some time, I could get back at a few of those men . . . principally Cullen and Durant and McEachern. Get back hard — you understand! Perhaps this suggestion of yours will give me the opening. Perhaps it will. That's what I'm wondering. I'm thinking it over. That's all."

Harmon controlled himself; his voice, when it came, was low and seductive.

"Well," he said, "could you get back any harder at people who haven't treated you right than by going back up there and making good? By putting something over on 'em,— something big, you understand — and making those fellows look cheap? By establishing yourself first, and keeping what's happened to you a secret, and building yourself a new reputation around your new looks? And getting solid with the folks on a new basis? Start fresh, and *be* somebody? And make a pile of money for yourself in the meantime? That's better than using a club on 'em, isn't it? Coals of fire, man, coals of fire! Show 'em what you *can* do — and take your satisfaction in that. Don't fight your enemies — you don't *have* to! Make a *profit* out of 'em! And then . . . oh well, I don't care what you do after that — come out in the open and give 'em the ha-ha or not, just as you like. Could anything be a neater little come-back than that? More sort of Biblical and thorough? Poetic justice? *Could* it?"

Hilliard was still alert and rigid.

"There's a good selling argument? And something good to sell?"

"As straight as a shoestring, and as sure as you're a foot high. And if you can't do business on *this*

basis, you couldn't sell gold eagles for a dollar apiece! That's flat!"

"So I could go back — and honestly make good? All the way? *Prove* what I can do? And not have any back-fire in it?"

"And have a chance," said Harmon, nodding, "to put yourself in right again. That's what my whole idea was." His intonation, as he watched the wonderfully appealing face across the table, was positively beseeching. "You'll never have the opportunity again. You might meet somebody you know tomorrow, and give yourself away — and then it's gone! If you're going to cash in on your hard luck, boy, you've got to speak up. That's *my* policy. Cash in on this thing the doctors did for you! Let's play it together, son. If it's a sort of whitewashing you want, I'll help you. . . . I'll give you the bucket and the brush, and you go up and go to work. I don't care a continental what you did to get in wrong in Syracuse — it's success that counts. Nothing else but success. And that's measured by the money you make, and how you make it. You know the crowd, and they don't know you, and you can *create* your success. Then after that — whatever you please. . . . Is it a bargain?"

Hilliard shut his teeth tight; reflected; yielded abruptly.

"It's a bargain!" he said. "I'm with you!"

"Good! Now —"

"One moment! Let's be frank with each other. Don't get any impression that I've done anything that's —"

"Mr. Hilliard, you don't have to talk like that to me! I've had you sized up from the start, haven't I?"

"Yes, but I wanted you to know —"

"But I *do* know, son! Wild oats, sort of. Am I right, or am I wrong? That's why I'm banking on you. People turned up their noses, maybe. Said things. Gossip. *I* know that sort of business. And you're sore — naturally. Well, this'll poultice everybody, including yourself. Go on back to your old friends. You're a new man: they won't know you. Make 'em *new* friends — and there you are."

Hilliard, tremendously excited in spite of himself, laughed aloud.

"It's better than what I'd planned to do, Mr. Harmon. I —"

"Yes — you'd have wanted to start a riot, I suppose. What good would *that* do? Oh, here's another suggestion. What would you say to no salary at all, twenty percent commission, and no limit to your expense account? But you pay back half of your expenses out of your earned commissions. On — say, a three month's try-out. How does that strike you?"

"It . . . why, I don't see what you're driving at."

"Because," said Harmon, "you're worth more than I thought you were. How do I know? I've watched your eyes, son! You're going into Syracuse with the finest plan, the finest front and the finest opportunity I've ever dreamed of in all my life! And besides that, you've got a spur that even *I* couldn't give you. . . . How are you fixed for money?"

"I'm not fixed at all. I'm broke."

Harmon fished for his bill-book, and folded two notes into a small compass.

"Here! Bind the bargain. Don't worry — it's an advance. I know who I can trust — that's my longest

suit, son. Give me a receipt, if you like. Better not speak to me again until we land. Never know who's aboard that might see you later. Come to my office at ten o'clock the morning after we're docked. And —" He laughed in patent relief. "You know, son," he said, "I'm a pretty wise old bird, and there's not much that fools me, but . . . right up to the last second, I wasn't quite sure whether you'd take that job or not. If the surgeon that mended you could only have doctored your eyes, son — if he could only have doctored your eyes! Whew!" He stared again at Hilliard, and nodded soberly. "Wonderful — perfectly wonderful," he said, fascinated. "When you smile at me like that, I sort of feel as though I ought to get up and take off my hat and apologize to you, and I'm hanged if I know what for. . . . Perhaps they overdid it a trifle . . . copied that picture *too* well . . . why don't you see if you can't grow a moustache . . . ?"

III

ACCORDING to the railway schedule, the journey from New York should have taken about six hours; as a matter of fact, it took seven, and yet to Hilliard, who hadn't once left the observation platform, it was accomplished with the speed of a projectile. The dramatic value of his purpose had seized him, and partly on this account, and partly because he was going home, he was temporarily relieved of perceptive judgment, whether of time, space, or attendant circumstances.

Harmon, very masterful and confident, had accompanied him uptown in a taxicab, and filled each moment to its brim with counsel and encouragement.

"Now, whatever else you do, son," Harmon had adjured him, "stick to the story! First, last, and always — *you stick to the story!* It's your own business, in a way; and in another way, it's *my* business; but you keep your head clear and don't let anybody shake you on the facts, and we're both all right. Of course, you're starting out by lying — but it's a *good* lie. You're justified. As far's the rest of the world's concerned, you're a new man. You're just born. Well, you've got a perfect right to be whatever you want to be. Nobody can prove you aren't what you say you are. And it isn't everybody that gets a second shot at life, either — but if they all *did*, I guess about a hundred and one percent of us would try almighty hard to be pretty different. . . . Now a salesman's got a

sort of poetic license, son. You've got to build up a reputation, and you'll certainly have to do some quick thinking not to ball up your story. But *stick* to it! Stick to it no matter if you have to overdraw your imagination every hour in every day. Be consistent. And don't lose your nerve, because the thing's absolutely *sure*. . . . Hello! Didn't realize we'd come up so fast. . . . No, you fumble, and I'll pay! . . ."

"All I'm afraid of," Hilliard had said, as they followed the porter down to the crowded ramp, "is the first two days. After that, I won't lose my nerve — I *can't!* But . . . it isn't going to be easy, Mr. Harmon — not for the first two days."

"Nonsense! Where's the flaw in it?"

"Well — nowhere that *I* can see."

"Nor I, either. . . . I won't go down to the train with you, Hilliard, I'll say good-bye here. . . . Well, don't forget you can't lose, provided you keep your head clear. You've got money enough to last a month; don't be too close with it. Write when you want more. . . . Now, just a word of suggestion; I wouldn't drink much of any, and —"

"I don't intend to drink at all."

"Well, I wouldn't go *that* far, son! Be cosmopolitan. Mix with all classes — drink just enough so you won't be a wet-blanket and not enough so you're a sponge. Sort of betwixt and between. And don't you worry about things. You're inclined to worry; I've noticed that. But in view of what your *intentions* are, every inch of this scheme's justified. Poetic license, as I said before. Be a good salesman. And, by the way, good salesmen report pretty often to the main office."

"I'll keep you posted, Mr. Harmon."

"I know you will. Well, it's close to train-time. . . . Just remember these three things: One, capitalize your experience, and fill 'em full of war-talk — they'll love it; Two, capitalize your position, and stick to your story — they'll swallow it whole, and never dream of the answer; Three, capitalize your face, and smile, man, *smile!*" Here he had planted his hand between Hilliard's shoulder-blades with a thump which was meant to be fraternal and heartening. "And we'll both make good until the cows come home — and I think I hear 'em coming. Don't forget — they can't stop you! It's your second shot at life, and you've got the cards stacked the way you want 'em. Think of that, boy — you're playing it alone with a pat hand, and they *can't* stop you!"

"The only thing," Hilliard had said, "is the . . . the story!"

"Damn it, Hilliard, what's the matter with you? Aren't you *justified?*"

"Y-e-e-s, but —"

"But what?"

"So much of it sounds unnecessary to me — every now and then. I wish we could have thought up something else, that's all."

"Well, *did* we?"

"No, but —"

"Then don't be a rank quitter! It was your own idea; and *I* say it's darned clever; stand up to it. You will, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll do *that*, Mr. Harmon. I've got to."

"Yes, you've got to. And just keep smiling, son; that's all. That's what I hired you for — start off smiling, and the battle's half won already. . . . *That's*

it! Keep your nerve, son! . . . Good-bye!" And here he had staggered Hilliard by another friendly buffet between the shoulder blades, and swung him cordially into the runway, and disappeared in the general direction of the Biltmore bar.

On the observation platform, Hilliard had ensconced himself behind a newspaper and a cigar, and tried to hold his emotions and his imagination in check. But the newspaper had lost its interest for him before the last of the numbered streets had flitted by, and as for the cigar, its flavour staled in less than a quarter mile. His thoughts had turned sharply inward; there was no need of any divertisement to keep his mind completely occupied. His whole consciousness, while apparently distilled upon the passing landscape, was circling endlessly about his own distractions; and yet, although he had intermittent spasms of conscience, he entertained no plan of surrender to them. Each milestone by the right-of-way was as a monument to his self-respect, which had died a fortnight ago, and yet (even in his apprehension) he was as resolute as when he had planned its burial.

His purpose, now that it was crystallized, brought him no aftermath of shame for what he was about to do — he was conscience-stricken only in respect to what he had done already, long ago; and his nervousness was due merely to his fear that he might fail in his purpose.

Fortunately, he had the observation-platform to himself. The solitude, and the still beauty of the Hudson and the hills beyond, loaned him at length a calmer spirit and a sturdy resolution. He found himself translating the valleys and uplands into the topography of

war; he laughed inwardly, and was relieved by the discovery that he could mentally relax. After all, what was there to discourage him? He had worked out a system of campaign as clear, as definite, and as inexorable as any field-marshal could ever hope to devise — and perfect. There was nothing for him to regret, and little for him to dread. He was simply bringing home one vital principle of trench fighting — to rely on indirect fire. That was it — to fight! To fight for reputation lost, and to defend his new advantage gained. It was nothing but a question of tactics. It was nothing but a matter of expediency. The end would amply justify the means; or — if the end by any chance proved to be disastrous, why, there was another principle he must remember — no quarter given or asked for. And as Albany dropped behind, and Amsterdam fled into the East, and Utica went out of sight in the gathering dusk, he was increasingly steadfast in his warlike determination.

"I'll teach 'em," he said unsmilingly to the blurred landscape. "*I'll* show 'em whether I can make good or not! Time! Time! That's all I want — time!"

To his vast perplexity, however, he had a very different and a very disquieting sensation when the train slowed for East Syracuse, where numerous factories and furnaces crowd in upon the right of way. They were hideous infernos, these stewing, belching factories, and he had always loathed them; but tonight, to his disenfranchised soul, they were suddenly a visible part of the community he once had lived in, and he looked upon them with a strange throb of homesickness in his breast. And then the express was running through twin lines of workmen's houses, shabby and sordid, but capable of

stirring up forgotten memories in Hilliard's brain, for this was the main entrance to the city, from the East. It was a grimy portal, but a portal nevertheless. And then the City Hall, bidding him its brief, impersonal welcome! The quadruple lamps of the cross streets! The jeweller's, where once he had bought a ring . . . the canal, where, at the end of a headlong walk one desperate night, he had later hurled it! The familiar, sooty, roaring, confusing station! It was Syracuse — the city which had shamed him into war! And as he descended calmly to the splintered platform, he was amazed and baffled by the realization that he loved it!

At the nearest curbstone, among the private cars and taxicabs, a motor omnibus bore on its side the name of the newest hotel, which was his immediate objective; but for reasons which he couldn't have explained, he avoided it, and signalled to a taxi. He had all an ardent lover's desire for privacy at this first meeting after many months; his glance, as it fell upon the least romantic of his surroundings, was eager, caressing. He sat upon the edge of the seat, devouring with his eyes each familiar landmark that he passed, and finding that the mere recognition carried pain. The speed of the journey distressed him — he could have prolonged it infinitely, and feasted his recollection upon the details that a year or two ago he had scarcely noticed. He craned his neck, staring at passers-by, and struggling to detect a face he could remember. He was so swayed by his unexpected emotions that even a display-window in a shop he had liked to patronize gave him sensations which earlier in the afternoon he had thought he had discarded for ever.

As the car came to a standstill at the motor entrance

to the hotel, he managed by great exercise of will-power to regain his mood of arrogant conquest, and it was imperative for him to regain it, inasmuch as his first ordeal was so soon to come. More than that, he had an ancient grudge against this hostelry, for it had successively declined to continue his credit, refused to honour his checks, and, towards the last, had politely suggested that he refresh himself somewhere else. One of his most galling memories was connected with this very entrance; his cheeks grew hot as he fought the vision down.

"*Now!*" said Hilliard, on the outer threshold. His feeling, as he went into the brilliant lights of the corridor, was as though he had plunged from a springboard into deep water.

He knew, from meticulous study and practice, the full effect of his manner, which was distinguished, patrician. He knew the almost irresistible magnetism which had befallen him by accident. He had been prepared — in his own imagination — for the battery of interest which was promptly trained upon him. And yet, as he pursued his luggage towards the desk, he faltered in his pride, he felt as though the sorrowful eyes of all Syracuse were riveted upon him; the well-recalled surroundings unmanned him, and he was impelled to halt, lift up his hands in token of surrender, and to cry out: "This is not I! This is *not* I! It is the man I might have been — if you and I had understood each other!" So great was his anguish that in that moment he honestly believed that it was the equal fault of the city, and of himself, that he had gone forth discredited.

Behind the desk stood a clerk and — Hilliard's heart tripped — the manager who had tendered him the ultimatum. Hilliard's pen spilt a blot of ink on the reg-

ister; his ears were tuned for the speech of recognition which would blast his dreams of triumph, and send him off again in multiplied disgrace.

"Yes, sir," said the clerk with extreme deference, "and about what price, sir?"

The manager, who had been scrutinizing Hilliard intently, whispered something to the clerk; the clerk bit his lip and looked up sharply; the prodigal winced, and stiffened. "Parlor C — ten dollars?" asked the clerk. "Very comfortable room, sir. . . . Front!"

The manager, as Hilliard retreated, said impatiently to the clerk: "What's the matter with you, Jimmy, anyway? Don't you know how to size up a man *yet?* Don't ask a man like that what he'll have — tell 'em what we've got!"

Upstairs, Hilliard went limp from the reaction. He had been positive of himself, he had gone over the comparisons time and time again; he knew that he was a stranger in figure, in gait, in voice, in countenance; still, at the instant of trial he had shuddered in guilty apprehension, and heard in fancy the voice of accusation. He had doubted what he *knew* — and this was proof of his lack of innocence. But the manager — who two years ago had called him by his first name — the manager had looked him full in the face, and made not the faintest sign of recognition! Hilliard smiled weakly at himself in the mirror, and wondered if he could dare to take the victory as an omen. He thought he could.

It was in improved confidence, then, that he went down to dinner; and deliberately chose a central seat in the most popular of the three available rooms. He was actively eager to be observed; now that he had passed his first examination, he craved test after test; no inqui-

sition could be too urgent for him. And at the nearest table sat a business-man he knew, and a girl he knew; from their matter-of-fact attentiveness, he judged that they had been married during his absence; they gazed interminably at him, but only in admiration. He mentally checked off his list — that made a trio of old acquaintances who failed to know him. Facing him, a dozen feet away, sat a man who had been Hilliard's employer for an epochal six weeks — this man, too, was obviously interested, but unenlightened. Four! A dinner party, comprising six girls and six young men, filed gaily past him; every one of the twelve he had known well, some of them intimately; they looked down at him in passing, and, without exception, went on in ignorance. A tiny roseleaf of a girl was rather noticeably attracted to him; she spoke to her partner, who turned, and stared, and nodded in the bored fashion of any escort to whom a handsome stranger is pointed out; and Hilliard could have laughed aloud at the irony of the incident. They had known each other for a dozen years, that girl and Hilliard; in the dozen and first, her mother had forbidden him her house,— and that made sixteen victims, and there was hardly any use of counting further.

He was suffused by the consciousness of dramatic success, and he would have given much to have had a confidant to share it. The whole situation was immense; there was comedy in it, but there was seriousness in it, too; in one moment, he was silently convulsed; in the next, cold beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. He was playing for stakes which a buffoon ought not to afford; and at the same time, he had created an atmosphere which wasn't comfortable for a culprit. If Har-

mon had only been there . . . if there were only some one to talk to, some one to act as counterfoil. It was all so diabolically public — and Hilliard was so entirely unprotected. He was reasonably safe now, and yet — being at heart a culprit — he always had a nagging inhibition to provide him with unrest, uncertainty.

Nevertheless, he dined with considerable leisure, and smoked a cigar almost to the end before he left the table. When he quitted the room, it was with practical assurance that his gravest fears were groundless, but for an additional precaution he read an evening paper in the lobby (and how the format and the contents clutched him!) and endured in safety the inspection of a score of men who had known him well enough to refuse to loan him money.

At half-past eight, vastly heartened and refreshed, he equipped himself with certain documents from his suitcase, and called for a taxicab. The address he gave the driver was high on the eastern hills; during the last half mile, Hilliard was peering out at the shaded lights of houses where he had played in his earlier youth. The names of the freeholders came automatically to his mind; sometimes he smiled spontaneously, sometimes he frowned at an incident of sinister recollection; twice his pupils contracted, and his chin thrust out in thoughtful aggressiveness. Then the car stopped; Hilliard went up a stone-flagged walk, up broad stone steps, guarded by graven beasts with tufts on their tails (they had seemed humorous to him once, but they were beasts of portent now), and stood on a huge veranda. He was calm, and yet his knees were disconcertingly unsteady; he was determined, and yet his heart was pumping in uneven beats; for the moment, his throat was dusty dry.

As he gained the level of the veranda, there was a stir of activity off to the right, and an erect, middle-aged man clambered out of a Gloucester hammock, and came briskly forward. Back in the shadows Hilliard could detect the soft outlines of a white dress.

"Yes?" The middle-aged man was politely brusque; and Hilliard, at the sound of that incisive voice of his, started in spite of himself, and swallowed.

"Is this . . . Mr. Cullen? Mr. James Cullen?"

"Yes, sir!" The middle-aged man was very convincing about it. "Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

Hilliard bowed stiffly from the hips — a touch of foreign courtesy which had its effect.

"If you're at leisure, Mr. Cullen, I should like very much to have a word with you. On — I think I may call it so — urgent private matters. My name is Hilliard."

"Er . . . business?" Cullen's voice held a rising inflection which intimated that commercial affairs should be confined to commercial hours.

"No — and not altogether pleasure." Hilliard's own voice dropped a semitone. "In brief, I've come up from New York today to bring you a letter from a young man named Richard Morgan."

"Morgan!" said the older man sharply, "Dick Morgan!" Back in the shadows there was a sudden rustle. "Where's *he?*"

"He's dead," said Hilliard. "He died in France." Mr. Cullen stood perfectly still, and Hilliard, watching him intently, was overcome by resentment at the knowledge that two years ago this man had held Hilliard's fate in his thick fingers.

"*No!*" said Mr. Cullen. "Of all things! Well, what d'you know about that! Dicky Morgan dead!" There was surprise, but little poignancy in his tone. "Isn't that terrible! And over in France! . . . Angela, did you hear that?" He produced a huge silk handkerchief, and blew his nose energetically.

More rustling from the shadows, and a slim figure stepping out of them into the foreground; it was Angela Cullen, just over the brink of seventeen, exquisitely small and blonde, and profoundly agitated by the news. Hilliard bowed mechanically; he had remembered her as a vivid little hoyden. Queer, that his heart should skip a beat or two at beholding her now. Queer, that his tongue should falter, and that he should stand dumb. But she had brought the first remembrance of untroubled days back to him, and the contrast hurt — abominably.

"Oh, *Dad!*" she said, with a quick intake of her breath. "Oh . . . *Dad!*" And clung to him for refuge, staring the while with wide and fearful eyes at the tall stranger who had delivered the laconic message.

Cullen held her close, and cleared his throat. He was in the common-enough situation of a man who feels that he ought to be deeply moved, and isn't, and wonders why; and his transparent effort to be funereal was slightly overdone.

"It's a great shock to us — of course," he said, speaking slowly. "A great shock. . . . Oh! Mr. Hilliard — my daughter. Well, I must say I. . . . Suppose we sit down and talk this over —"

Hilliard bowed again; Mr. Cullen, his arm encircling Angela, led the way to the Gloucester hammock and its reinforcement of wicker chairs. The trio was seated;

Hilliard coughed delicately, and after that, there was a brief silence. Gradually, the air was charged with constraint.

"You've just come up from New York, Mr. Hilliard?"

"This afternoon, sir." Hilliard was mentally collecting the details of his mission; but as he looked across at the two Cullens, his nerve wavered, and he was sickened by the fear that, after all, he might not be able to resist the subtle influence of his own emotions. Here he was, and there was Angela and Mr. Cullen — all of them a little older, all of them a great deal more repressed, but even so, here they were, these three, just as they had sat in the same place, on the same sort of summer evenings, when Dicky Morgan wasn't yet anathema, and when . . .

"This . . . this thing happened some time ago, did it? You were abroad yourself?"

"Yes, I was."

"I want to hear about Dick," said Angela in a dry little voice. "Please! And . . . and who are you, Mr. Hilliard?"

"Angela!" said her father, reproachfully, but Hilliard, coughing with great vehemence, felt a sudden inrush of triumph which gave him confidence. It was the triumph of dramatic success; the consciousness that whatever might come next, he had actually appeared before people who knew him best, and that they saw a stranger. He was unexpectedly miserable at this juncture; he was very seriously distraught and depressed; nevertheless . . . Hilliard smiled, as a churchman smiles.

"All I pretend to be is a friend of Dick's. I —"

"Oh! A friend!" Cullen's intonation was curiously warped.

"Yes, sir. If I weren't, I shouldn't have made this journey in quite this way." Again, a surcharged silence.

"Go on, please." Cullen's attitude had changed; he was sitting more nearly upright, and his demeanour was that of a jurist rather than of a mourner. Angela, however, was tense; and so it was to her that Hilliard directed his recital.

"Perhaps you'll understand better if I go back to the beginning," he said hesitantly. "Shall I?"

"Do." Cullen motioned him carte-blanche, and Hilliard took a long breath, and began.

"Back in May, 1915," he said, "I went to England and then to France to arrange some government contracts for copper and copper products. In France, I was stunned — as every one is — by the back-lash of the war. And like every one else, I did what I could on the spot . . . bought tobacco for the soldiers, and all that sort of thing. It isn't a question of charity, once you see the circumstances — you simply look, and realize that the most you can do is so trivial in comparison with what there *is* to be done that you . . . well, you do all you can and wish to Heaven it were ten thousand times more. And then you try to find out where your mite will do the most good, and it staggers you because there are so many places where they need everything you have and everything everybody else has. It so happened that a friend of mine was in one of the American surgical units at Neuilly. I couldn't spread my own little contributions over all the institutions that needed it — there wouldn't have been enough to notice, so

naturally I spent most of my time and most of my money at Neuilly. It's the largest strictly surgical base hospital in France, you know; the Red Cross was running it then, in the buildings built originally for the Pasteur Institute. Well, the cases there are all severe. The men need more help than the average, and there was one ward in particular . . . I won't describe it to you, but the first time I ever set foot in it, I knew I'd found the place to take all I had to give. And it was there that I met this man Morgan." He paused a moment. "And Morgan needed me more than any one else in the ward."

"Was he . . . hurt so badly?" The girl's voice was taut with feeling, and although Hilliard knew that she had cherished a juvenile affection for Dicky Morgan, he really marvelled that it had so endured.

"Yes, badly," he said, "but that wasn't the point. He was alone. He was friendless. He was under the darkest cloud that ever man can live under. *You* know what it was, Mr. Cullen."

The older man nodded tardily.

"I have an idea," he conceded.

"Well, there he was — wounded, and marooned in France, and with a bad conscience. Perhaps you can understand why he got my sympathy."

"Poor Dick!" said Angela, barely above a whisper, and Hilliard, looking across at her, was stirred by vague intuitions which rendered him guiltily uncomfortable. It was a full two years since last a tender sentiment had exercised any power over him, and he had thought himself immune to women for ever; but as the picture of war-drenched Neuilly rose before him, and through it, as through a filmy veil of unreality, he saw this serious

young girl in all her sweet compassion for the man he once had been, he was chastened and humiliated, and his words tripped in his throat.

He sat motionless, idly closing and unclosing his fingers. The peace and quiet of the night were robbing him of rancour, and his tumbling thoughts were suddenly gentle and quite unselfish. Indeed, he was wondering whether he had gone so far that retreat was impossible; he was wondering whether certain other friends of his would take the news as Angela took it, for if so, there was little necessity for the stratagems he had planned, and less excuse for them. It had simply never occurred to him in announcing the death of a man who had run away from Syracuse in disgrace, he might find pity and forgiveness waiting for expression. Was it too late already to retract? Had he said so much that explanation was in vain? Was there still an opportunity for him to change his tactics, to admit that it was only the unregenerate soul and the outward countenance of Dicky Morgan that had perished, and to maintain that a new being, a penitent and resolute being, had arisen phœnix-like to make atonement for the wasted years that had been ended by shrapnel-fire from the Huns? And suppose he did so, what would they say? If public opinion were to model itself upon the sorrow of poor little Angela Cullen, was it not better to confess at once, to wipe the slate clean, and to begin afresh? Had he said so much that the pathway to truth was closed — or was a lie well stuck-to better than the truth, half told?

Morals, which are nothing but negative virtues anyway, hang on trifles. Hilliard was tottering on the uttermost edge of decision — and Mr. Cullen flung the

weight of an aimless charge against him, and settled the matter out of hand.

" He certainly had plenty to be sorry for," said Mr. Cullen.

" Oh, *Dad!* " said Angela, with a quick intake of her breath.

Virtuous, was Mr. Cullen. A church-goer and a communicant, was Mr. Cullen. A giver of alms, and a friend to his friends — but in forgetting that the evil that men do shouldn't rightfully be allowed to live on after them, and in remembering, perhaps too clearly at that moment, the final interview he had held with Dicky Morgan, Mr. Cullen throttled repentance into a state of furious helplessness, and brought back Hilliard to his senses.

" Yes," said Hilliard, " he had plenty to be sorry for, and he was. First and last, he told me a good deal about himself. Of his troubles here, I'm not capable of sitting as judge. Instead, I sat as confessor. So that you'll be more interested in that part of his life which you evidently haven't known about, and I have. He left here, I think, in December. He hadn't any fixed purpose; all he wanted was to find a place where he could begin over again on a fresh basis, and make a man of himself. . . . For that much, at least, you can give him credit."

" And I do," said Cullen, approvingly.

Hilliard, swept again by the nearness of deliverance from his deceits, leaned forward. A strong endorsement of Morgan's ambition at this juncture might yet have brought about a recantation.

" I'm glad you do, Mr. Cullen. . . . I think myself it was the only course he could have taken." He hung

perilously upon the response; it would either justify or condemn his present attitude.

"That's probably why he took it," said Mr. Cullen. "Oh, I'm *fair* enough to him, Mr. Hilliard, but as for *judgment* —" He shook his head firmly. "What made him go to France?"

Hilliard sat back — it was more than likely, then, that the public would reflect the opinion of Angela's father, and not of Angela. The gates of truth clanged shut.

"That came to him as the logical course," he said shortly. "He'd met with some brother adventurers in New York, and they put the idea into his head. He had no money, so that he worked his passage across on the *Mouette*, a French tramp, in January, 1915. On the other side, he met a lieutenant of artillery who took a fancy to him. As you undoubtedly know, he spoke French like a native, and that made it easy for him. France is a land of papers, and of records; and papers and records can be created, altered, shuffled — when there's a reason. The reason was that the Republic needed men — and the lieutenant was willing to be a forger if that were a condition to his being a patriot. His conception of patriotism was to enlist every able-bodied man in the service of France. But at that time, the war was still rather exclusive as far as Americans were concerned. So that Dicky Morgan disappeared from earth — and there was a new soldier of the 69th Territorials by the name of Pierre Dutout . . . 'Peter Nobody.'"

"*What!*" said Mr. Cullen.

Hilliard shrugged his shoulders.

"I said he told me much about himself. He sailed

under his own name, and I dare say you can verify that in New York. But when he landed, he took an alias. To be sure, that was primarily to get him into the service as quickly as possible, but there was another reason, too. I've already intimated what it was; and the two ideas dove-tailed perfectly. He had wanted to start over again, unhampered. Nothing could have been more opportune than this chance. See what it gave him! He simply dropped out of the world! . . . And although it was a clear case of coincidence, still, his life here must have been anything but successful to drive him as far as that — because if he had cared to wait a little, he could have enlisted honourably, in his own name. . . . No, I think it was the possibility of losing himself utterly that first appealed to him. And there must have been a good cause."

"Yes," said Mr. Cullen absently. "There was. But . . . always theatrical, Dick was. That was so like him — to do just that sort of thing, and to do it just that way."

"As nearly as I could gather," said Hilliard, "he had been practically . . . er . . . ostracized here. Is that correct?" He noted that Angela flinched at the suggestion, and that her head was drooping very low.

"Why, I'd hardly say *that*, but —"

"At least, he had lost many of his former friends, hadn't he?"

"Y-e-e-s, but there was a good reason for it."

"Oh! *Dad!*" said Angela, pleadingly, below her breath. "*Please* don't say things l-like that — I can't *stand* any more —"

"What his offence may have been, I don't know," said Hilliard, plunging doggedly into his narrative.

"But he left town, so he told me, in a tremendous revulsion of feeling. His one ambition was to make something of himself, to wash out the past — to justify his existence. And he went overseas not merely in a spirit of adventure — I hope I didn't give you that impression — but with the idea of genuine service and sacrifice. And very soon, terribly soon . . . during a night attack . . . they got him." Hilliard paused effectively. "There wasn't a chance in a hundred for him to recover, and he knew it. And then it came to him, blindingly and desperately, that the world — that is, the world which had known him in his failures — would never hear what he had done. He had made his sacrifice, and it was useless. In hospital, he was Pierre Dutout, you see . . . and between that character, and his own, was the barrier of the subterfuge he had grasped so eagerly — his alias, and his false record. It was so complicated that no one would ever search out the truth. No one would have any reason to doubt that he wasn't what he purported to be. He craved to tell some one; to send back a message to his old friends; and I happened to be there — and he confided in me. And here I am, Mr. Cullen. Bringing credentials. Now, in the first place, I have a photograph of him, taken from his original passport." He produced it from his pocket, and offered it to Mr. Cullen. "Is there any mistake, sir? Or is it the Dick Morgan you know?"

Mr. Cullen switched on a standing lamp; Angela hid her face, and shrank back from the white electric glare.

"Yes — yes." He gave the tiny picture to his daughter. "There's no question about it, Mr. Hilliard."

"That's Dick!" said Angela agonizedly.

"With his signature, of course — you recognize it, do you?"

"It's his handwriting fast enough," conceded Mr. Cullen. He looked up at Hilliard, and his brows were furrowed, as though he were struggling to comprehend what all this had to do with the Cullen family. "Yes, there's no question about that, either. Very characteristic — you couldn't ever mistake those flourishes. Dramatic boy, he was — always. Shows — don't it?"

"Dramatic — yes. That is — imaginative. Venturesome. And it's a quality that sometimes makes heroes, Mr. Cullen. . . . Would you have called him brave?"

"I'm not sure of that, sir. I —"

"*I* would!" said Angela. "*I* would!"

"Foolhardy, often. But *brave* . . ."

"Wait, then!" said Hilliard, motioning. He was transfixed by the vision of Angela Cullen, who had started up in passionate defence of an old-time playmate; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were shining, she was ineffably appealing in her tearless grief and in her loyalty. For the first time, Hilliard could see how the passing years had brought out the woman in her; he could see, under the dazzling light of the porch-lamp, what an adorable champion he had left behind him. Her vehemence thrilled him; his own cheeks reddened, and his heart was abruptly quickened at the sight of her at the same time that it congealed from her father's estimate. "You know," he said, "that bravery under fire has a peculiar reward. It's called a citation. In orders. You think that Morgan wasn't brave, Mr. Cullen. But there's a proof. A proof that

even *you* must recognize." He tempered his voice. "For *here*," he said, whipping a folded paper into view, "is what the Republic of France says about him! *Here* is the record that will endure as long as France does. *Here*, Mr. Cullen, is Dicky Morgan's citation! . . ."

Dead quiet — for second after second. Angela had turned pale; she was winking hard.

"His . . . citation!" Mr. Cullen mopped his forehead.

"His own copy of it was lost, but I brought the official journal . . . shall I translate?

"'Pierre Dutout, private of the 69th Territorials, during the battles of the fourth of May and the days following, has made exhibit of the highest devotion and the greatest courage; and especially by carrying out a volunteer duty, under heavy fire on the night of the sixth of May, has given to his whole detachment an extraordinary example of loyalty and heroic sacrifice.'"

He gave the newspaper to Mr. Cullen. "And *here* — is his *Croix de Guerre*." On impulse, he handed it not to Mr. Cullen, whose palm was ready for it, but to Angela.

She had taken the decoration half-fearfully, and she had glanced at Hilliard with an expression so curiously combined of awe and joy and jealousy that his own eyes wavered, and he had momentarily averted his gaze. When he had ventured to turn to her again, she had carried one hand to her breast, pressed tightly, she was looking down at the bronze cross in her lap, and her shoulders were shaking perceptibly. Hilliard

gripped the arms of his chair, and every muscle of him was drawn tense . . . his farce was sudden tragedy, and horror clutched at him. Angela was crying . . . stoical, by supreme effort, at the news of Morgan's death, she was crying, now that she believed he had died gloriously. It was a hard problem for him to analyse . . . it was so magnificently complimentary and inconsistent . . .

"It would seem to me," said Mr. Cullen, somewhat thickly, "that he wiped the slate clean enough for all practical purposes, anyway." He took the war cross from Angela's reverent fingers, and examined it curiously. He looked at Angela, and slipped his arm around her; she sat up straighter, and drew a shivering breath. "I may have been wrong in my judgment," said Mr. Cullen soberly.

Hilliard, who had been moodily sunk in revery, fumbled a third time in his inner coat pocket.

"He sent you a letter," he said. "I suppose you've been wondering, under all the circumstances, what brought me up here to you. It wasn't to eulogize him particularly; it was to bring you his message. He sent it to you because for some reason or other he thought he owed it to you especially. And perhaps I'd better say now that he made me read it . . ."

With Angela peering hard over his shoulder, Mr. Cullen strained to decipher the uneven penmanship; which, combined with the Continental transparency of the paper, forced him finally to resort to a pair of tortoise-rimmed spectacles. He began to read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Cullen:

"I am asking Mr. Henry Hilliard to bring you this

letter personally. I want him to tell you what I'm *not* writing, too. And you can tell other people, if you care to.

"I want you to know that since I've had time to think, I've changed my mind about a good many things. I've come to the conclusion that you were right and I was wrong. Maybe you won't remember the last talk we had together, but I do. You told me then that I didn't have it in me to make good unless I learned that I was about the most worthless young man in town, and the one with the hardest row to hoe in order to make something out of myself, and set out from there. Well, I've learned it. I had to. Of course, I couldn't agree with you at the time. That wouldn't have been expected. But over here I've had one lesson after another. Some of them were pretty bitter, but they've all helped. And since May, when I was hurt, I've had lots of time to think them over.

"I never deserved your kindness, and now I can't ever repay it. But it may please you to know that this war has taught me what you tried to, and couldn't — that I was as close to zero value at home as a man could be. It's only through this war that I've got any pride in myself, and I'm sort of like Kipling's gentleman-ranker — I'm proud of myself because I've done away with all the other kinds of pride I used to have. And I believe I've made good—not as a great general, but as a private soldier. That was the trouble at home — I was only fit to be a private, and I thought I could be a general off-hand. You said I'd do well if I learned that, and I have. They gave me the *Croix de Guerre*, and in a way, that proves it, doesn't it? Notice that they didn't even make me a corporal, though! That's all right — I haven't had enough training yet to be a corporal! It's curious that I'll admit that, isn't it?

"I want you to know that I've thought of you a

great deal. I don't blame you for letting me go. I did once, but I don't now. Please think of me, though, as a man who came through at the finish, even if he'd been pretty hopeless before.

"Hilliard, the best man in the world, has promised to bring you this letter. I hope you'll be glad to see him, and to hear his side of the story. This is my apology and my blessing, if that's worth anything to you. I send a kiss to Angela.

"R. C. M."

Mr. Cullen ended with a falling inflection, and let the hand which held the letter drop to his knee.

"The letter, as you might guess from the looks of it," said Hilliard, "was written at several different times — according to his strength. I want you to realize, too, Mr. Cullen, that it was no small effort for him to write it. And then I was in Switzerland when he died, and his possessions had all gone to one of those tape-bound bureaus, so that I had a fearful time to identify myself and get what he had meant me to have, and after that, I had to make a sudden trip to Russia, and back to England again. There were delays — delays. I was ill for several months myself; I had typhoid in London. I should have mailed these things to you long ago, but he had begged me to come in person, and I had promised. And every day I expected that in another week or two I should start for home. I feel that I owe you this explanation and a great plea for forgiveness for what must seem to you like gross indifference on my part. But I landed hardly two weeks ago, and I came up to you at the earliest possible moment."

"In some ways, he was a most remarkable young

man," said Mr. Cullen, irrelevantly. "Nobody ever understood why he turned out such a black sheep. Came from a fine old family. I suppose his father was one of the most loved men in Onondaga County. Dick lived for years on his father's reputation, after people stopped noticing him on his own account. Just took advantage of the fact that nobody could quite bear to be harsh to his father's son. But he was always a wild young chap,— nothing very bad, except that just too much of anything —including liquor — was just enough for him! Had too quick a temper to be diplomatic enough to hold a job, and didn't care much about working hard, and finally the tide turned, and he began to get treated just as if his father *hadn't* been a sort of popular idol, and then his disposition soured, and he made some bad mistakes. I gave him the last job he ever had in Syracuse, but I had to let him go . . . and I told him some plain facts when I did. That's what he refers to."

"I assumed," said Hilliard, hesitantly, "that at one time he had been what you might call . . . disappointed in love? Something was weighing on him — he practically admitted . . . but that was one point that he didn't appear to want to confess, even to me."

"He was engaged to Carol Durant." Angela had taken the cross again, and held it like a precious relic. "She broke it off, just before he went away."

"The *day* before," added Mr. Cullen. "That was one of the two reasons why he went."

Hilliard nodded.

"I see. . . . On account of his habits?"

"That was the gossip," said Mr. Cullen heavily. "Dr. Durant was supposed to have —"

"Didn't he write to her?" asked Angela, raising her eyes.

"Not that I . . ." He stopped quickly. "I trust you'll forgive me, but I'd imagined from various remarks he made at different times, that he was really . . . that he was greatly attached to *you*." This last was addressed to Angela, who was both dignified and shaken by the suggestion. Her father, however, nodded in the negative.

"Angela wasn't much more than fifteen, sir. They were great friends; he was very fond of her. No, it was Carol Durant he was engaged to. Didn't he ask you to see her?"

"No."

"But you will, I hope, won't you? I can appreciate how you might feel about it, but —"

"How are *my* feelings to enter into this, Mr. Cullen? My responsibility is to do what ought to be done. And if you'll tell me the people you think I ought to see about this —"

"You can see Carol here tonight, if you care to," said Angela, uncertainly. "She and . . . and a friend of hers are coming over to talk about another Red Cross drive. Carol's on the committee. They ought to be here any minute now."

"Yes," said Hilliard. "If I'm going to see her, I think I should rather — see her here."

Mr. Cullen sighed stertorously.

"Well, perhaps it's better . . . and I shall want to telephone this to the *Herald* if you don't object. It's the least we can do, all things considered." . . . He reflected a moment. "How long are you staying in town, Mr. Hilliard?"

"I've made no plans whatsoever," he said, after a slight pause. "I sold my interests to a British syndicate of bankers two months ago. My home is where my baggage is. And, as a matter of fact, that's where it's always been. I ran up from New York to deliver my message to you, and beyond that, I haven't any schedule or any duties. I'm thinking of taking a day or two to see certain of Dick's friends — the ones he talked about most — and after that, the future is on the knees of the gods."

Mr. Cullen regarded him with sincere respect.

"It would give me great pleasure," he said, a trifle pompously, "if you would be my guest for the time you're here, Mr. Hilliard. I feel as though you'd got a sort of claim on us . . . coming like this — and it would please me very much indeed." Hilliard's heart pounded.

"And me too," said Angela, gently. Hilliard's heart threatened to suffocate him; not entirely because the game was going so infinitely better than he had dared to hope, but also because it was Angela who entreated him.

"It's wonderfully good of you," he protested, "but I couldn't disturb you to that extent. Thank you but —"

Mr. Cullen stopped him by an inclusive gesture.

"You won't disturb us in the slightest! It's a big house; and Angela and I are all there are in the family. I wish you'd come with us, Mr. Hilliard. I should feel much better than having you stay down town."

"Well —" said Hilliard, dubiously. His soul was filled with unholy joy, but his outward demeanour was deprecatory. "It's ever so kind of you; still —"

"As a favour to me," urged Mr. Cullen.

"As a favour to *me*," echoed Angela, and Hilliard looked attentively at her, and was obviously swayed. She noted it; he had intended her to notice it. He gave her a smile which had the power, even in her sombre mood, to draw a faint response in kind.

"If you're sure it won't be a hardship to you —"

"Nonsense! It's settled, then, is it? I'll send one of my cars down for your things."

Hilliard's eyes flickered at the ingenuous vanity; he had recently learned that Mr. Cullen had made more money during the past twelve months than during the previous twelve years.

"Well," he said, "if you're so charitable as to *insist* —"

"I do, sir, I do! . . . You're at the Onondaga, of course?"

Angela, who had been listening intently, started up at the unmistakable echo of footfalls on the walk.

"Here comes Carol!" she gasped. "And . . . and Jack! Oh, Mr. Hilliard! Oh, Dad! Who's going to tell her!"

As Mr. Cullen flinched, Hilliard put out his hand in a motion of supreme restraint. His voice was low and pulsing; and laden with a curious quality which engendered calm and confidence.

"Whatever Dick Morgan may have been at home," he said, "I knew him after he offered his life for a great ideal, and I'm proud that he called me his friend. I'll tell Miss Durant myself, please. It's my right."

And turned to face the girl he had tried to die for, and failed.

IV

SHE had already been, when he last saw her, the outstanding beauty of Syracuse, but he was astounded to behold what the interval of two years had done for her. The traditional Greek purity of line had always been hers, and the Latin purity of colour as well; moreover, she bore herself precisely as he last remembered, with her head carried high — not in imperiousness, but with surpassing interest in the surrounding world. She had, however, taken upon herself a new maturity; her figure, exceptionally graceful, was still slender; but suggestive of a more womanly, a more inclusive charm. Hilliard, at sight of her, was visited by a twisting pain, part hatred for what she had ceased to be to him, and part concern for the ideal he had adored, and found improved.

He was being presented to her! He, who had kissed her a thousand times, was undergoing the ritual of presentation! — and she was smiling at him with those grave, sweet eyes of hers, and calling him by his adopted name! His mask of protection had never seemed so slight, so insufficient; the fragrance of her, and the illusion caused by this, threatened his balance and set his nerves on edge; fortunately, the routine of the conventions intervened to save him from his inarticulateness. For one thing, there was the rite of introduction to Armstrong, and after that there was a dash of promiscuous conversation, with not a little weather-philosophy in it. Then came the inexorable

hush caused by the presence of a stranger whose fads and fancies are still a matter of conjecture, and out of that hush, a question, and Hilliard was suddenly visited by a species of self-hypnosis.

If he had been moved at all by the sight of Angela, whom he had loved as a younger sister, he was, by comparison, shaken as by a whirlwind by the sight of Carol Durant, whom he had loved as a woman. To be sure, he was relieved of the necessity of choosing his course of conduct — he had done that, irrevocably, half an hour ago — and to that extent, his mental struggle had lessened; but not on the train, not at the hotel, not even when he witnessed Angela's severe grief, had he remotely conceived that this instant would be so difficult to surmount. What in New York had seemed a regeneration, and earlier on this same evening had appeared a very dubious deception, was rapidly taking upon itself the colour of irremediable wrong. His imagination was aroused beyond belief; and as he stared in dumb suspense at Carol, recalling a thousand episodes and a thousand privileges of the long ago, he was preyed upon by a slow-stealing grimness of despair which left him sick with misery.

She was waiting for an answer — and the others were waiting, too, and watching him . . . he felt surrounded and borne down upon by a crushing weight of accusing personalities. He felt that guilt was stamped on his every feature . . . he felt that every thought of his must be as crystal to the four who waited for him to speak.

He was himself and he was not himself; he was ostensibly Henry Hilliard, a man in whom it couldn't be suspected that the heart and soul of Dicky Morgan

were embodied; he was a transcendentalist; a spectator at his own funeral. The emotional appeal of it got him in its grasp; when he glanced at the telling letter which he himself had written, he was pushed to the brink of hysteria; the sight of the *Croix de Guerre* of poor Pierre Dutout, who in bequeathing that impressive bit of bronze to him, hadn't dreamed that he was leaving a heritage of chicanery along with it, engendered in Hilliard a thrill which nearly found its outlet in a paroxysm of wild laughter. And the newspaper, with Dutout's most genuine citation in it! Poor, generous, warm-hearted, sentimental old Dutout in the next bed! And the old passport photograph which he had hidden for fear that his real name, endorsed on it, might be cabled home, together with proof to the world that he hadn't been a hero — that he had failed in this, as in every other undertaking of his life. And all the dates in accuracy! And if any one cared to trace back the story, where was the flaw? Where was there a loop-hole? And who would recognize Dick Morgan in his cloak and mask of utter miracle?

Who *had?*

Lightning-like, his brain included all the salient items of the picture in a single flash. There was Dicky Morgan, sailing away to France — which could be proved. There was a Number, and a Name attached to it, and — since Hilliard's sturdy defence of Dicky Morgan had had a grain of truth in it, and one of the steps of his many-sided progress carefully omitted — a Name had really been assumed, and had endured from the date of enlistment to the date of discharge. It was the Individual's recorded name in the army and at Neuilly — and it wasn't Morgan and it wasn't Hilliard and it

wasn't Dutout. No one here knew it, or ever would know it; even Harmon didn't know it; it was the first sobriquet of a shell-torn Individual who had been taken to Neuilly, and been made whole again. *No one at Neuilly had ever set eyes on Dicky Morgan's face!* But a certain man named Dutout had been decorated and died, and that could be proved — *was* proved! Hilliard had borrowed Dutout's name in perfect safety; and the trail was cold. And here was a fourth man, Hilliard — to take his word for it — and the world is larger than the curiosity of sincere people to encompass.

No — if a Neuilly surgeon ever told as one of the mysterious chapters of the war what had happened to a certain gloomy Individual that summer, the name would suggest nothing. And as far as checking up the visits of a mythical Hilliard to a very real Dutout was concerned, who would profess to remember? The testimony of any single witness would be immaterial.

The voice of Carol Durant was echoing in Hilliard's ears, and Hilliard, yielding to a tidal wave of recklessness, and of swelling anger at imaginary wrongs, looked squarely into Carol's eyes, and spoke with winning urgency.

"Yes," he said. "I *have* news of Morgan. In fact, I'm here in Syracuse solely because I have it. I've just been telling Mr. Cullen — and Miss Cullen — that I was with him when he died."

She didn't speak, at first; she merely looked at Hilliard and grew very white, and her lips quivered. She stood there, still with the shadow of a smile arrested in its place, and presently she swayed a little, and reached out with her hand towards the back of a convenient

chair. Armstrong stepped towards her, and Angela Cullen slipped an arm around her waist.

"He's . . . dead?" she repeated, and her tone was not yet free from a certain incredulity, as though the fact were of itself impossible, and the statement of it subject to discussion.

"Yes, Miss Durant."

She moistened her lips; her eyes were very bright, unnaturally bright, so that Hilliard was fascinated, and appalled.

"You. . . . You *know* that?" she asked, again with that queer inflexion of amazed doubt.

"Yes, I know it."

The others were standing as statues; Mr. Cullen, snatching at the first idea of consolation to present itself, fumbled for his daughter's other hand, which still retained the trophy a better man had won.

"Here's what they gave him, Carol! Look! The *Croix de Guerre!* Don't let's think of anything but what he . . . let's be proud of him! I—"

"Oh, yes," she said inertly, and took the cross in her palm. She dropped her eyes for a moment, then raised them to the level of Hilliard's. Her calmness was almost that of stupor, but in the choking silence Hilliard imagined he could sense the exertion she was making to retain her balance. "Didn't he send some word to me?"

"No." Hilliard's nod was very ministerial. "No, I'm sorry, but—"

Her eyebrows lifted, and her nostrils dilated the merest trifle. Her breath was coming more rapidly now; she was nearing the breaking-point of her resistance, and all of them knew it. The moment was

agonizedly prolonged. Hilliard, gazing without a quaver at the girl he had thought he loved beyond all else in this world or the next, was singularly relaxed as he observed her symptoms. She had really cared, then . . . so much the greater pity that she hadn't kept *him* caring . . . as she might.

"Can that be possible?" she said, hardly above a whisper.

"I'm sorry — but —"

"I wouldn't have believed it could be true." She gave a long, tremulous breath, and looked about her, half-dazed and half-perceptive. Her eyes strayed back to Hilliard. "Tell me about it," she said, almost inaudibly.

"Carol, dear!" Angela was stimulated to active sympathy. "Sit down — *please!* Oh, Mr. Hilliard!"

"No — yes, I . . . I'll sit down!" Her eyes seemed magnetized to Hilliard's. "Only I want to hear — I want to hear!"

"Tell her from the beginning," said Cullen, mopping his forehead. "Tell her just the way you told us a little while ago. And let's all of us sit down — and, Jack, you know the lay of the land, don't you? Get a glass of water . . . anything else, Carol?"

She shook her head. "Tell me!" she said. "I want to *know!*"

So that Hilliard, inspirited by the realization that he was under the protectorate of the shadows, and gathering fresh assurance with every sentence, went through that tragic narrative a second time. The inspiration of it was doubly strong; his love of the dramatic and his sense of boundless injury kindled in him an ardour which served as colouring to his words;

the nearness of Carol to him was no longer a deterrent, but rather an incentive, because, now that the initial shock of the meeting was over, he was again infected by the wrongs that he had suffered — wrongs for which he had always felt that Carol Durant was finally to blame. Once she had pulled his bleeding heart to bits; he found himself, to his own wonderment, revelling cruelly in the opportunity for reprisal. His rapid changes of sentiment astounded him; only a few minutes ago he had been ready to repent, now he was implacable — and this was after the arrival of the only woman he had ever loved. It was inconceivable, and yet it was a fact — and Hilliard made the most of it. And as he told the tale of Dicky Morgan, he was greatly engulfed by the surge of Dicky Morgan's grievances; his voice trembled with righteousness; he gradually lost his loathing for the part he played, and played it with every atom of his energy; he was a defendant, and a witness and a judge for Dicky Morgan all in one — and his verdict was for acquittal. There was no mistaking his earnestness; it rang with every syllable, and it rang true, because now, at last, his resentment to the injustice he fancied to have suffered, was fully concentrated — and there was nothing of pity or of generosity left in him. His pupils, diminished to pin-pricks, were grey and cold as the northern seas; Miss Durant's eyes had never left his face.

"And that," she said presently, "is all there is to tell?"

"That's the end," said Hilliard simply. And in the long hiatus which followed, he was wondering . . . wondering . . . vague aimless thoughts, with no beginning and no conclusive outcome, but the central figure,

flitting, elusive, was always Carol Durant. He could turn away from her in diffidence, but he was incapable of shutting her out of his mind; strive as he would, the images of ancient days kept crowding back to haunt him. . . . He told himself fiercely that he hated her, that for two vengeful years he had hated her, that he had come back to Syracuse primarily to see her again, and to rejoice in the fall of her pride . . . he hated her with his whole soul for the wounds in his heart, the wounds of his body, still . . . O God! why couldn't the surgeons have cut away his memory, and left him peace!

He was prodigiously relieved when Mr. Cullen, well-meaning but awkward, blurted out a paradox of eulogy. Armstrong, eager to relieve the congested ways of thought, ventured into the realm of platitude — and something in his manner caught at Hilliard's attention. The man was actually possessive — and Hilliard, having no envy of his possession, cursed him on general principles nevertheless. And then Hilliard was again in demand; there was a flood of incoherent questioning, and he was giving details, answering queries, volunteering information which might never have been asked, describing Neuilly, the hospital, the surgeons, the nurses, the wholly indescribable atmosphere of France in war-time. He was strengthening his position, phrase by phrase; his insouciance redoubled; he had laid a rock foundation never to be successfully assailed. There came an abrupt pause; Miss Durant rose, and came to him, and he was on his feet to meet her.

"Thank you," she said, giving him her hands. His heart missed a beat; his blood ran gelid. "Thank you. If you can . . . I wish you'd talk to me again before you go . . . alone . . . I wish it very much.

You've made me . . . at least, I can be glad you were there . . . to help him, but I want to know so much more . . . so infinitely much more . . ."

The others had risen, too, and stood a little apart, talking meaningless things with considerate disregard of the two at the veranda railing. A fleeting impulse clawed at Hilliard's judgment; he yielded to it blindly. It meant the alteration of his plan of action, it meant a trifle more of danger; and a gratuitous risk at that, but it was genius — genius!

"Miss Durant!" He made sure that the others were beyond the range of his voice. "Miss Durant! There's one more thing you *must* know . . . I said he sent no word to you; that was true as far as I knew the truth, but there's one letter he started to write — just at the last . . . it wasn't addressed to any one; I didn't know who it was for. I brought it with me on the chance that I'd find out. I didn't want to speak of it before every one, because if it's yours, I thought you'd . . . you understand, don't you? . . . but from what Mr. Cullen said just a minute before you came, and from . . . from other things . . . I'm almost positive it was meant for you. It's only a few lines . . . he wasn't ever strong enough to finish it . . . I've got it at the hotel now. May I bring it to you to-morrow?"

She held her breath for an instant; her mouth quivered. She looked at him searchingly.

"Surely. I . . . I live just across on the corner, Mr. Hilliard. The brick house. Can you come early?"

"How soon?" He was telling himself that his former passions were atrophied; she was no longer able

to disquiet him. His inspiration was commercial — strictly commercial.

"In the morning? At . . . eleven?"

"I'll come gladly."

"And . . . and I want to thank you now," she said in a tone which would have fallen as a blessing upon the ears of any other man alive, "for speaking as though you loved him. And for all you did for him. And for . . . for coming to us. Because all that makes you seem . . . how can I tell you, Mr. Hilliard? . . . Perhaps you know already . . . perhaps you *can't* know . . . but I'm trying to tell you, because he was . . . he was one of my very dearest friends."

His brain snapped; he bent down to her.

"You loved him — too?" he said, uncontrollably.

"Yes," she said. "Once — I loved him, too!"

V

ALONE in the appointed guest room of the Cullen home — for Mr. Cullen had been as good as his word, and sent a car to fetch his visitor's belongings — Hilliard lighted a King's size cigarette (an acquired taste, but advisable as a minor deception, since he had long been notorious for his taste in cigars) and grinned expansively. He was spent by the force of his own fervency, but the reaction was pleasurable, and he had no conscience to harass him. He strolled lazily across the room, examining with critical interest its costly and horrendous furniture, solid and pre-Victorian, and paying especial heed to the old-fashioned rugs and hangings.

"Cullen hasn't spent a dollar on the house," he said reflectively. "Nothing new downstairs and nothing new up here . . . all he's done has been to buy the infant some grand clothes, and hire a flock of servants, and get a string of motors. So if he hasn't invested everything, he's got all his war-profits yet. I ought to nick him for twenty-five thousand *easy!* And when he fired me he said I was a rotten salesman. Oh, I don't know."

Leisurely he began to undress, but before his boots were quite unlaced, he sat back comfortably in his chair, and meditated.

"All serene *so* far," he said. "But when Carol came in . . ." He shook his head vigorously. "Well, it's over . . . anyway. The Doctor . . ." Hilliard's

face darkened. "There's the man *I* want to get at! Pious old hypocrite! And *he* didn't think I deserved to be in the family! Sort of hate to let him make money out of this deal, but it's all in the game. Coals of fire! But ten thousand's a lot from the Doctor . . . we'll say ten thousand."

He closed his eyes dreamily; and his thoughts reverted from Dr. Durant to the Doctor's daughter.

"Carol — Carol!" he murmured. "One minute there, I thought I'd crack. And I was 'one of her dearest friends.' I was, was I? And she loved me — once. *Once!* Pity it wasn't twice! Pity she and the Doctor didn't say so the night they kicked me out so neatly —'only to meet again and share the inward sweetness of the other's heart!' Well . . . business is business . . . After they've made *their* money out of it, and found out this man Hilliard's some little gold-plated whirlwind all by himself . . . Gad! can't I see their faces when they get the truth of it!"

With the cigarette drooping from his lips, he stood up, and swept a clear space on the table. From his suitcase he exhumed a tablet of thin transparent writing paper of a kind not sold in America: it was the paper on which the letter to Cullen from Richard Morgan had been written, and it was sheer luck that Hilliard had brought the remainder of the tablet from New York with him. He tossed a blob of ink from his fountain pen, and inspected it critically.

"Too black," he decided, and went to the bathroom, where he half-emptied the reservoir of the pen, and re-filled it with water.

"That ought to be just about right . . . sort of pale and mysterious and war-strength."

He seated himself at the table, took the pen in his left hand, and inscribed circles on the paper; scribbled a meaningless sentence, and laughed gently.

"Funny how some people can be ambidextrous and take so long to realize it. If I hadn't caught a bullet in my arm, and tried to write left-handed in the hospital, I'd give myself away up here in no time. Writing's too blamed distinctive. But, as it is, Left Hand, very large and plain, is Henry Hilliard —" Here he shifted the pen to the other hand —"And Right — and, small and curlicue, is poor, dead Dicky Morgan —'one of her dearest friends.' I'm glad I killed that chap off — he never amounted to a hill of beans anyway. But this *Hilliard* person — a live wire, boy, a live wire!"

And with a grin of sardonic humour, he wrote on the flimsy paper, slowly and a little irregularly, as though in physical discomfort:

"Neuilly, 7–19–15.

"No matter what you ever think, no matter what you have ever thought, I have loved you."

He grimaced, pondered diligently, and made a correction.

"I have always loved you more than my own life. You said my ideals had fallen — do you think so now? I don't, dearest; I think they're almost what you would have them. And it may be that simply because of that, I've loved you more every day, and —"

Hilliard sat back, and his eyes were softly luminous.

"Suppose, by the luck of the very devil, I should fall in love with her again?" he said aloud. "Suppose I

should!" He tossed away his cigarette, and rested his head in his hands. "Oh, Carol! I *did* care . . . !" His shoulders shook spasmodically; then all at once he flung himself out of the chair, and took to tramping the floor in a hurricane of emotion. His face was set in granite; he caught sight of it in a mirror, halted, and himself was stunned by the transcendant mask which covered his soul in revolt. The work of the surgeons was not far short of miraculous; he couldn't upset it, not by any effort of his will. The eyes might flash, or lower, or chill — the other features were still calm and strong in all their splendid glory. Even now, the face which he saw reflected in the mirror was one to convert the most hurried of all passing strangers to a new, if unformed, assurance in the brotherhood of man.

"You dirty blackguard!" said Hilliard, showing his teeth. He went pensively back to the letter, studied it, gazed at the floor.

"But after all," he said, "no matter what she or anybody else did to me . . . and if I can kill two birds with one stone, and be what I've *wanted* to be — all except this damnable way of going about it. . . . She acted as though this infernal lying letter would please her — that's not the *point;* it's a quicker way to get at the Doctor. . . . Well, it gets her a letter I never intended to write . . . and Dutout's war cross, too . . . that'll make it all the easier. . . . I'll give her that. Angela was going to have it, still. . . . So I was 'one of her dearest friends,' was I? What's that worth to Henry Hilliard, bringing back the news from the front?" He sniffed scornfully. "Ten thousand dollars — I hope. And the Doctor'll make twenty out of it. . . . Gad! that's turning the other cheek with a

vengeance! Hanged if I don't almost wish he'd *lose* his rotten money! But that can't be helped — *I'll* get some satisfaction somehow."

He re-read the unfinished note, folded it, creased it heavily for verisimilitude, and gave it the final examination.

"Business . . . is business," he said, musing. "That was a pretty sporty thing for me to do . . . to tell her there was a letter. Bit of a chance, too. And after smashing our engagement, she could stand there and tell me . . . oh, rubbish! So suppose we say . . . *fifteen* thousand from the Doctor! But confound it — the better salesman I am, the more I get out of *him*, the more he makes! Whew! Where's the satisfaction in *that!* . . ."

His pupils had narrowed again, giving the lie to the sweetness of his smiling mouth. Then the smile faded, and Hilliard was staring fixedly at the document in his hands.

"I wonder who in thunder that man Armstrong is," said the masquerader who had prided himself that he no longer cared.

VI

HE wakened early; and in that state of half-conscious revery which has less of worldliness in it than perhaps any other state of human existence, he relaxed utterly, and gave himself over to his random thoughts. He had no real sensation of thinking; his mind was merely a rendezvous in which a train of phantoms, one by one, could rest an instant before they passed on as they had entered, aimlessly. And as long as he lay thus vegetating, he was subtly aware that he was very peaceful and content; but presently, when his brain had yawned and stretched itself, and begun to set about its usual functions (or, in other words, when Hilliard was sufficiently aroused to resume his usual introspectiveness) he was extremely unhappy, and not in the least vainglorious.

At the outset, he couldn't account for the basic cause of this unhappiness; sleep had so cleared away the accumulated dust of his troubles that for a puzzled interval he was as sincere and innocent as though he had never tempted fate, nor planned an ambush for society. Indeed, there was an appreciable space during which his memory failed to include the events of the last few days — he was lying there and thinking the thoughts of Dicky Morgan, racking his intellect to know why he should wake up with such a heavy burden of regrets. Then suddenly, stunningly, the whole kaleidoscope was spinning out its vivid forms before him, and Hilliard groaned, rolled over towards the light, and began, dully, to remember.

He was gloomy, and the taste of ashes was in his mouth, but simultaneously, now that his mind was active once more, he had a momentary burst of pride for his recent craftsmanship — it was a pride in which the dominating element was a sort of professional regard for his own ability as a protagonist, rather than conceit for the results attained. But as for genuine contrition — never! The world was committed to the doctrine of give and take — and just as formerly it had given to him of its bitterness, so could it take in turn what Hilliard had to offer it.

But there were fresh grievances to brood over . . . he scowled, and struggled to remember what it was that had risen out of thin air and angered him last night, at the very instant of his dropping off to sleep. Not the Cullens, nor Carol herself, nor Armstrong . . . but wait a moment!

It came to him, then, accompanied by a slight acceleration of his pulses, that he had resented the proprietary manner of this stranger Armstrong; not that Armstrong had actually said anything or done anything to cause remark, but that he had carried himself with such an indefinable assurance towards Carol — an assurance which was all the more significant because it wasn't pushed forward, wasn't conspicuous. He wondered, with a recurring spasm of logic, what justification he possibly had for resentment, or even casual criticism of Armstrong's behaviour. He was no dog in the manger! His old relations with Carol Durant were over; why in the name of Heaven should he resent Armstrong?

But . . . as long as he was on the subject . . . who was Armstrong? Whence and whither, Armstrong? A

newcomer to Syracuse (that is, within two years) and already proprietary — Hilliard frowned, and rubbed his eyes, and wondered anew. He was a trifle amused and a trifle ashamed of himself; was it credible that he could be jealous of a man who had merely appropriated what Hilliard had no further interest in? How inconsistent . . . and yet how superbly characteristic of human nature! Hilliard chuckled to himself in recognition of it, and dismissed the proposition as unworthy of further attention. Dismissed it, yes . . . as a child dismisses a rubber ball with an elastic cord attached to it. . . .

From below stairs, a Japanese gong chimed softly, and Hilliard, without delaying another instant, leaped to the floor. Half an hour later, bathed, shaved and dressed, he descended complacently; the second day of his remarkable performance was begun.

The Cullens, father and daughter, were waiting patiently for him in a breakfast-room which was partly a summer porch, or a summer porch converted into a breakfast-room, depending on your first impression as you entered it. They greeted him cheerfully; and he was glad that grief hadn't clung to their eyelids; he would have felt depressed, even although he would have sensed the hidden compliment. After all, Morgan hadn't exactly been beloved by Mr. Cullen, and Angela had the mental resiliency of youth — it was better so. And Hilliard, quick to grasp the nearest handle of diplomacy, saw that cheerfulness on his own part would help the situation, for now that his duty as a courier was over, there was no need for long protracted melancholy.

It was a cheerful trio, then, that finally sat down to

breakfast; there was no exhilaration about it, but at least there was no sombre cloud of mourning. Angela, behind the coffee urn, had occasional moments of pensiveness, but that was to be expected, and condoned; indeed, Hilliard held himself to be greatly favoured by even this. And he was favoured not only by the evidence of her regard for the man he once had been; as time went on, he came to understand that she was mildly interested in his present self. Her brief, unstudied glances showed this; and Hilliard, now that the fear of exposure had largely gone from him, encouraged her — partly because it was good business, and partly because it pleased him to be mischievous.

She was imaginative, and Hilliard's pose was calculated to appeal to a lively imagination. He had been in France, he had seen a corner of the great adventure; he had about him an aura of unusual accomplishment, and he had a face which was supernaturally attractive. These factors aided him in the beginning, and to them, with keen accuracy of design, he added a fifth which was perhaps the most efficacious of all five — he treated her not as a young girl, but with the respectful deference which belongs to a mature woman, a mistress of a household, and a hostess in her own right. She was charmed and captivated, and so was her father — most assuredly he was! So charmed, in fact, that instead of leaving for his office at half-past eight, he lingered until half-past nine; so captivated, that as his limousine slid quietly down the long, steep hill of James Street, he found himself ascribing a new degree of credit to Dicky Morgan for the simple reason that Dicky Morgan had gained the full esteem of such a friend as Hilliard. Such a substantial, polished, earnest, worldly friend!

A man with such a fund of general knowledge, and of such great vigour in imparting it. A man who asked such intelligent questions, for example, about the commercial possibilities of Syracuse, and comprehended all the intricacies of the labour problem, the raw-materials problem, the transportation problem, the production problem. A man who, in addition to his understanding of the war, and international politics, and financial matters, could also talk the language of a manufacturer . . . and how could Cullen dream that Hilliard was cleverly dragging into conversation the selfsame theories, the selfsame data, which, on innumerable occasions, he had heard from Cullen's very lips not many months ago!

A mighty nice young man, thought Cullen. A man of soundest judgment, through and through. A man of brilliant intellect and razor-edged analysis. Had he not said, and furnished illustrations from his broad experience, exactly what Cullen himself had said, in regard to labour, and materials, and transportation, and production, these half a dozen years? Cullen sat back and smiled triumphantly. It does a man good to hear his pet convictions approved, expanded, and laid down as axioms by another wise man.

Back on the wide veranda, Angela had curled up comfortably in the Gloucester hammock, and beside her, Hilliard was enjoying a King's-size cigarette. He was enjoying, too, this rare interlude of respite; he looked across at Angela, and thanked his stars for the invitation which had made this quiet hour possible. She was so ineffably innocent, so free from any taint of specious worldliness, that her mere presence refreshed and cheered him; he felt a delicious release from the strain

of yesterday, and he enjoyed it to the full, knowing the limitation that must necessarily be put upon it.

She lifted her eyes, caught Hilliard smiling at her, and blushed furiously, not for any shame accruing to her, but because she had arrived at the age of easy blushes.

"I . . . suppose you're going over to Carol's pretty soon," she said, constrained to say something, and grasping at the first available idea.

"So anxious to get rid of me?" he asked, amused.

"Oh, *no!*" Horror was in her tone, and mortification. "Only . . . I was thinking . . . this can't be the pleasantest morning in the world for you."

"No — and almost yes," said Hilliard, soberly. "I hope I haven't yet reached the stage where I can't agree with Walt Whitman — remember where he says that if you keep your face to the sunlight, the shadows will all fall behind you? Or aren't you acquainted with the gentleman?"

"N-no," she said dubiously. "I'm not. But I can see the point, just the same. . . . It's awfully curious, but ever since I woke up this morning, I've had the queerest sensation — almost *glad* about something. It's made me feel so wicked — I can't make it out at all." She regarded him seriously. "I suppose you think I'm heartless," she said.

"On the contrary."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Well, I'm glad of *that*," she said, relieved. "Because I didn't think anybody on earth could understand but me. . . . You don't mind talking about Dick, do you?"

"No." Hilliard shook his head, but instinctively he went on guard again.

"You see," she said, swinging gently, "I never had any of my friends . . . I mean, I . . . *you* know. I can't quite say it — it sounds sort of sacrilegious, somehow. But everybody else is still here. I should think I ought to feel ever so much worse than I do . . . wouldn't you?"

"Not necessarily." Hilliard's brows furrowed. "There are always two ways of looking at it."

"Yes, I know. And I'm looking at it the other way." She hesitated, and suddenly glanced up, and leaned forward. Her lips were parted slightly, and in her eyes there was awe-struck wonder, not without a certain mistiness, and a certain calm. "I . . . I'm almost *glad*," she said, under her breath. "I don't understand me at all, Mr. Hilliard . . . he was the nearest to a brother I ever had . . . and I always did want a big brother. And when he went away I cried my eyes out. And last night, I . . . oh, it was *awful!*" She sighed as though in exquisite care. "But this morning, when it's so sunshiny and quiet, and I've had a chance to think . . . and remember a lot of things you never even heard of, why—"

"What things?" he demanded quickly.

"I'd rather not say." She sat up a little straighter, and stopped swinging. "But I can't cry any more. That part of it's all gone. And I'm happy, in a funny solemn sort of way. You don't suppose there's any Elsie Dinsmore in me, do you?"

Hilliard's mouth twitched, but he controlled himself as he perceived her very genuine seriousness.

"No," he said. "Far from it. . . . Go on, please."

"That's all. It's so unlike me, I'm almost scared. But I can't help feeling . . . you've read 'A Tale of Two Cities,' haven't you? And what Sydney Carton said — I mean what it says he *would* have said if he'd been a prophet? About his going to do a better thing than he'd ever done — and all that?"

"Yes," Hilliard nodded. "'It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.'"

"That's it!" she said softly. "Well, that's how I feel about Dick . . . and you couldn't cry if you felt that way about anybody, could you?"

"No," said Hilliard. "If you really do."

"I do," she said steadily. "I do. And it's just the way he'd have wanted to . . . to have things work out. A little excitement, and a little danger, and a little glory, and a little . . . praise. There's really not much else anyway, is there?"

"Not very much," he agreed, presently.

"I wanted to talk to you before you saw Carol," she said. "Because Carol doesn't . . . I don't think she'll exactly feel as I do about this . . . I know she won't. Maybe it's because Dick and I were chums, and she and Dick were . . . oh, *you* know. It's different. You ought to take that into consideration — when you talk to her, I mean. I don't mean I don't *care*, because I do — terribly — but I . . . I can see what it meant to Dick . . . and how it's sort of fitting, this way — as long as it had to come *some* way — and all I've got left is a heart-ache and a big, glad thankfulness that he could go in and do something to help out . . . and I know how he'd have loved it, and picked this out of every

possible way to . . . to end things, but Carol . . . she's different."

"How?" Hilliard's voice was even, but very low.

"Older," she said, looking away.

"Yes?"

"And . . . and they were going to marry each other sometime."

"But wasn't that broken off?"

"Yes, but she was waiting."

"Waiting?"

"Why, of course."

Hilliard's breath quickened.

"I should have guessed that this Mr. Armstrong —"

"Oh, but that wasn't until she thought Dick wasn't ever coming back. And besides, she isn't really crazy about him — just lonesome."

"Indeed." Hilliard compelled himself to relax. "So you think she'll be . . . hurt?"

"Hurt!" Angela's voice was thin with emphasis. "Rather!"

"If there's anything you think I'd better say, or not say —" He rose, out of sheer inability to endure this ingenuous estimate of Carol's heartache. "Perhaps you'll tell me — because it's time for me to be going over."

Angela had risen, too, and stood beside him. Her features were composed, but still suggestive of inward emotions a little too tender to convey. Her eyes were very soft, just then, and into them had crept a spark of that all-embracing devotion and compassion which, when it comes to its full expression, is called maternal. It startled Hilliard; he had never regarded Angela in exactly this light. It stirred him; for two years ago,

his dashing little friend had been anything but altruistic. She had, instead, been rather the reverse. The tomboy.

"If there's anybody in the world," she said, "who could give Carol any consolation just now, it's you. . . . Carol isn't the kind of girl who'd go tell her troubles to a minister . . . but she's going to need a whole lot of talking to, or she'll just wilt. . . . Dad and I were going over it this morning, before you came down. . . . I don't suppose you ever *were* a minister, but you look as though everybody could come to you and tell 'most everything, and you'd help . . . anyway, you'd try to. So I wish you'd . . . you'd sit and listen . . . . Carol's got to talk to somebody, and when you're hurt the way she is, you can't talk to your family . . . and you were a friend of Dick's. And . . ." She swallowed, and went on more slowly. "You can use your own judgment, of course, but if *I* were in your place,— I'd lie."

"Lie!" he repeated, aghast.

"Yes, I would! He . . . he *must* have sent her some word, Mr. Hilliard! He *must* have!" She was desperately serious now, and thoroughly aroused. "It means the whole world to her! It's everything! Why, even *I*'ve got more than she has, and she was waiting for him to come back to her! I'd lie myself black in the face, but I'd tell her *some*thing — tell her anything I could think of to make her believe he hadn't stopped caring! It can't do any harm now. It can't hurt *you*. And *I* won't even ask you whether you do or not. Only you're here, and she'll trust you —"

"Will she?"

"How could she help it? And . . . and that's all. *Please* don't let her think he didn't care!"

Hilliard stood irresolute; chaos in his brain. Beside him, Angela looked up in supreme appeal, intent upon the charity she had begged for another. There was no blot on her conscience; she had asked for a lie, but a splendid, forgiving lie, and she was fearful only that Hilliard's rectitude would forbid the utterance.

"I'll . . . see," he said with difficulty. "I'll see."

"Won't you promise me? I won't ask you afterwards, if you —"

"Does it mean so much to you?"

"Ever and ever so much. . . . Won't you please promise?"

He gazed at her a moment, yielded with a show of reluctance.

"Very well — I promise."

"I knew you would!" she cried, exultant.

"Did you? How?"

"Because you would," she said enigmatically. "That's the kind of man you are. I knew. You'd do anything in the world for a friend of yours —"

"And you think I'm doing this for you?"

"Oh, no!" she said, withdrawing slightly. "I . . . I'm not as conceited as *that!* It's for Dick."

"No," said Hilliard. "For you."

"But *I'm* not . . . I mean, I thought —"

"My newest friend is a friend just the same."

"Then you *wouldn't* have . . . have told even a kind lie like that for Dick?"

"Perhaps not."

"Or to help Carol?"

"Would you suspect it of me?"

"Then I don't *see*—" She was inextricably puzzled.

"Because you've asked it," he said, "and because it's the dearest, most generous, most thoughtful thing I ever heard of in all my life. . . . And after that, can't we be truly friends?"

Flushed, perplexed, honoured, she gave him her hand with a hesitancy which betrayed the deep sense of compliment she felt.

"I don't think I could be prouder of anything that could possibly happen to me," she said.

Was it worth the blatant mummery he had conceived and executed? Was it *not* worth that, and infinitely more?

She was proud of his friendship . . . and she shared that distinction with no one else in the entire universe.

Proud of it! Hilliard was fulsomely abased. Abased,— yes, and simultaneously glorified. He had come to make the city proud, ignorantly proud, of the man whose deeds had merited no renown. Here, at the very inception of his plans, a seventeen-year-old girl was proud of him as he was. Courage. Inspiration. Resolve.

He had won her respect by the promise of a lie; and in this instant he vowed to deserve, by other and increasing lies if need be, the prestige he was unalterably committed to gain, whereby the past should be as nothing, and the future should be a magnificent citadel of reconquered dreams.

She was proud of him, and she had approved the lie in behalf of Dicky Morgan's memory. Unwittingly, she had sanctioned the very purpose of his coming, and the

method of his approach. She had confirmed his own intentions, and given him the will to advance. He was to act as the staunch defender of her playmate perished, and to make of himself a new and a better man, worthy of the eulogies which, as trustee, he now accepted for the unworthy Morgan. He consecrated himself to this end. Told himself fiercely that he *would* succeed. And she was proud of him! It was another omen.

VII

IT was eleven o'clock to the minute when Hilliard, not quite so blithe as a wedding guest, and yet not altogether as doleful as a mourner, waved his hand to a slender girl who stood on the veranda of a house diagonally across the street, and went slowly up the Durants' brick walk. He had anticipated the effect of this pilgrimage upon his nerves, he had discounted it; and Angela's advice had given him an artificial stimulus for the moment; nevertheless, as the front door opened to him, and he saw, over the head of a smirking maid-servant, a hallway and a vestibule unchanged, his breath came a little faster than usual, and his cheeks went a little darker. It was, so to speak, a return to a shrine, and a normal man might easily be pardoned for a little sentiment on the side, no matter how often he had changed his religion during the meantime.

The maid, having deposited him in the living room, disappeared in a quick flurry of skirts; Hilliard, standing at the end of the long, high-roofed apartment, found himself surrounded by a thousand goads to remembrance. Not an item was out of place; not an item was otherwise than as he had often recalled it; his memory had been photographic. It was a room furnished comfortably rather than luxuriously; it suggested good taste rather than great riches; but here and there, concealed under the delicate veiling of good taste, was a rug or a vase or a bit of furniture which Hilliard knew, from personal knowledge, to be comparatively priceless. The Durants

were the sort of people whose ancestors had bought and builded for posterity; the Durants' heirlooms reflected distinguished credit on the ancestors.

At the opposite end of the room, flanking the black-marbled fireplace, was a graceful, swan-necked sofa, beautifully carved and splendidly upholstered: Dr. Durant had once remarked that Carol represented the fifth successive generation of her family to be courted on it. And evening after evening, in the ages that had gone before, Hilliard had sat there and dreamed and loved; and sometimes when Carol had slipped away from him he had sat there and dreamed and loved and smoked, while she played Chopin and Rubinstein and Moscowski to him. Old-fashioned she had called him; ultra-conservative, impossible; but he had still held out for melody instead of mathematics in music, and begged for simplicity in place of de Bussy, and got it. And the piano — somewhat battle-scarred but withal a master instrument — was still over in its accustomed place, with the Military Polonaise perched open on the rack.

And then an antique clock caught his attention, and gazing at its queer, hand-painted dial, he recalled how on a certain New Year's Eve he and Carol, after the Doctor had considerately left them, had watched its tremulous hands feeling toward midnight, while their own clung together in what they imagined was eternal understanding. Familiar paintings hung upon the walls; and Hilliard, who in his callow immaturity had looked upon them with critical disdain, found himself strangely affected by the native sincerity of Cantwell, and Walker, and Miss Scott. He had argued that no great works could come out of Syracuse, and here he was discovering that a man who has looked upon old

masters and remained apathetic, can readily grow impressionable before a canvas depicting nothing more significant than a snow-storm in Amber, Onondaga County, New York. How should it happen? Sincerity — that was it! That was what appeared to him in this, and in every other detail of the home. Sincerity in the pictures, the furnishings, the whole tone of the room and of the house . . . sincerity everywhere, save in the man who stood there to observe it. But even as he sensed this stinging fact, his pupils narrowed to grey necks of ice; for memory, by one of those tricks against which there is no defence, told him that he had stood in this same position, in exactly this same spot, when two years ago the Doctor had pronounced his sentence, and Carol, in terrible silence, had then and there confirmed it. His imagination conjured up that scene again; his blood chilled; he could fancy that Carol and the Doctor were actually before him, and that he was staring at them in the flesh, and feeling the lash of the Doctor's quiet peroration. . . .

To break the spell, he went ahead a step or two, and paused at the massive table where always a few books were ready for immediate diversion. Not parlour-books, Roycroft and others for display, but books to be picked up and enjoyed in random minutes —" The Cambridge Apostles," and Boswell's " Johnson," and " The Cruise of the *Cachalot*," and " Tristram Shandy," and " Mr. Dooley " and " Roughing It " and " The Ordeal of Richard Feverel " and " Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant " and " Whispers About Women " and other volumes by Stephen Leacock and Henry Harland and Alfred Noyes and Gilbert Chesterton and John Masefield and Robert Grant — such a collection as no fam-

ily but the Doctor's, or one with equal breadth of experience and appreciation, could possibly put on the living-room table except as the result of chance, or a sale of remainders.

At the threshold, then, there was a faint rustle of fabric, and Hilliard turned. Carol! His hands went out mechanically, and hers to him; and Hilliard, tasting the acid of his sombre mood, smiled benignly.

"I mustn't keep you waiting," he said, dropping her hands. "I've brought you the letter I spoke about." He gave it to her, and coughed his embarrassment. "I'm positive it's for you. And I'm sure you don't want anything to prevent you from reading it at once, so if you'd rather prefer to have me come back later for the talk you wanted —"

He was already moving toward the doorway; she restrained him gently, although her eyes couldn't be dragged from the folded paper he had given her.

"No," she said, "please don't go. I particularly want you to meet my father, Mr. Hilliard. He's anxious to see you, too. Won't you wait while I call him?"

He inclined his head; followed her with his eyes to the hallway, strained his hearing, and knew that she had opened the letter as soon as she was out of his sight. His lips twitched cynically — and then, as he remembered Angela's injunction, straightened. After all, this much was pure charity. Down the hallway, there was the reverberation of a closing door, and silence.

It was perhaps five minutes before that door was reopened, and during the interval, Hilliard had an opportunity to wonder if the Doctor had revised his office hours; otherwise, he should now be down in the

Physicians' Building, receiving patients. It occurred spontaneously to Hilliard that both Carol and her father were conceivably harassed by contrition, but as he estimated the extent to which their sorrow might go . . . judging by Carol's distress of last night, and the potential truancy of the Doctor today — he was possessed of gripping emotions. Had they cared so deeply for him then? Angela and Carol had said so; but he had doubted what he most wanted to believe. Was this additional proof? Had the Doctor cared so deeply that in order to hold converse with Dick Morgan's sole executor, he would interrupt the sacred routine of his practice? Too late! Too late to care, too late to sympathize, only the winter-garment of repentance was left for them! Hilliard couldn't comprehend why, when he had risen this morning so refreshed in mind and body, he should now be so unutterably wearied in both.

Carol returned, followed by a gentleman of sixty; and as the Doctor entered, the room was suddenly permeated by an atmosphere of calm, and kindly peace. He was a large man, large of feature, and large of instinct; his forehead was that of an intellectualist; his eyes were those of a dreamer; his chin denoted rugged capabilities, and the stubbornness of unswerving ethics. The hand he offered Hilliard was the hand of an artist; a strong, and well-fleshed hand, generous, sensitive, soothing — it was more than the hand of a mere artist; it belonged to a fine physician.

"Mr. Hilliard?" His voice was pitched low, but its resonance was striking. Thirty years ago the Doctor had been a famous baritone; and there was still one

church in town which dated its musical supremacy from the choir he had organized and directed.

"Dr. Durant!" The two men clasped hands firmly. Hilliard, experiencing the dreaded sinking sensation which came upon him as often as he exposed himself to yet another old acquaintance, hardened as he perceived no recognition in the Doctor's eyes. The inevitable reaction left him momentarily weak.

"It was good of you to take this trouble, Mr. Hilliard. I appreciate it."

Hilliard's denial was highly courteous; it was harder to hate the Doctor than he had planned.

"No, Doctor — it would only have been blamable if I hadn't."

The Doctor, motioning him to a seat, remained standing, near the table.

"I insist that it's good of you. . . . You knew Dick intimately, I understand."

Hilliard nodded.

"Very intimately, sir, considering the length of time." He perceived that Carol was holding the letter lightly folded in her hands; she intercepted his glance, and coloured proudly.

"It . . . it *did* belong to me," she said, subdued. "And I can never thank you enough . . . *never* . . . !"

"My daughter," said the Doctor, presently, "has told me the one great fact." He paused, then went on gravely. "I accept it, and it needs very little comment. It's one of those realities that contains itself, and all the attending circumstances. What most concerns me now is to know the lesser facts. I have some hope, Mr. Hilliard, that you can make the lesser seem the

greater; and the greater, the less. I want you to clear up the one cloud that still dims our knowledge. I hope you can tell us something about Dick's reasons for doing this thing — for going abroad at all, and for enlisting, and for —"

Hilliard winced; the Doctor's autopsy on his character was considerably more disconcerting that Mr. Cullen's had been, and furthermore, Hilliard had been prepared for another series of eulogies, and not for psychoanalysis.

"Dr. Durant, I can't think it's fair to put Dick's motives under the microscope like that! Why not forget everything *but* the attending circumstances to the one great fact. He —"

"I'm not unfair," said the Doctor slowly. "I've never been unfair if I could help it, and certainly not to this man above all others. But my greatest weakness has always been a tendency to let my heart run away with my judgment. Here is a case in which a man who left us most unheroically comes back to us, in spirit at least, as a hero. The particular thing he did is a fact. I'm proud of him for it — and so far, for that, and for that only. But it isn't true that by itself alone it made him a hero. And when I said that I'm interested in the lesser facts, I mean that Dick's reasons for going into the war at all may be the proof that he *was* a hero — and that any physical bravery he may have shown has nothing whatsoever to do with it. Do you see what I'm getting at?"

"Not exactly, sir!" Hilliard was red and resentful.

"Simply that there are two kinds of heroes, Mr. Hilliard. It isn't merely the excitement of the hour that counts — it's the quiet resolution, formed beforehand,

and lived up to. It's the motive behind the resolution. To be a hero — which is to say, not to fear death — can be atheism or it can be aphasia, or it can be what I want it to be — conscious duty, self-abnegation. And Dick's motive, which may seem to you a very slight consideration, means more to me than his physical bravery, which may seem to you the only item of importance. I knew him beforehand, you see. So that I should be happier if I heard that he had gone with inspiration, and not —"

"You're afraid he made a virtue out of necessity?" Hilliard's lip curled.

"That's exactly what I fear — and I'm hoping that you can persuade me to the contrary."

"And that appears to you to be more vital than what he *did?*"

"Bravery under fire," said the Doctor, "means infinitely less to me than bravery during a man's struggle with his soul. . . . Please don't misjudge us. We're not trying to belittle anything Dick did; it's neither fitting nor possible. But what we want to know is where the credit lies — with Dick, a reasoning, inspired, determined man, or with Dick, intoxicated by danger. In the latter case, his heroism would appeal to us as a detached incident, having no relation to his earlier life or to our own; it would be something to bring us pride for *that*, but for nothing else. In the other case, the knowledge of the *why*, in addition to the *what*, would bring us . . ."

"You'd argue, then, that even if a man's decorated —"

"Nine times out of ten, if the truth were known," said the Doctor, "the decoration ought to have gone to some one else. Perhaps a comrade — perhaps a wife

five thousand miles away. Unfortunately, there aren't many decorations for purely moral courage. . . . But about Dick?"

"You can be happy, then," said Hilliard uneasily, "because he went over, I believe, in the firm conviction that every man has two countries — his own, and France."

"Yes?" The Doctor sat down abruptly.

"As long as you're interested in what he did before he was wounded —"

"And afterwards, Mr. Hilliard."

"— Rather than how he was hurt, let me assure you that as far as I know, from the first day he landed, I don't believe he thought once about his own misfortunes. He had them, I know. But if you've got any manhood in you, you can't think of your own troubles, over there. It's too fearful. The Carrel-Dakin solution heals all sorts of wounds, Doctor Durant, all but the worst wound of all — and that's what every man who has any humanity and any sympathy about him gets when he first sees France. His heart is torn clear out of him. He can't sleep, he can hardly *live* with his own thoughts. And that quiet resolution you speak about — it's enough if it comes to a man *there!* I don't care what he had in his mind when he left you; I don't care what it was that led him to go overseas; I don't care what his purpose was when he sailed; I *know* that when he stood on French soil there wasn't an atom of selfishness or self-pity in him. It wasn't a question of adventure; it wasn't a question of drowning his sorrows; it was a question of his doing anything and everything he *could* do to help out. He felt that by throwing himself into the situation with all his might he could make up, to some extent, for

the not very helpful life he'd had here. Let me tell you something." Hilliard sat on the edge of his chair. "It's possible that you never thought of Dick Morgan either as a martyr or a fatalist. Nor do *I* think he was. But when he was brought to Neuilly, there was among his papers a little sort of field diary — I'm sorry it was lost, so I haven't it to show to you, but I saw it often — and under the date of his first tour of duty in the front line trenches was scribbled this, quoted from Rousseau: 'The dead carry to the grave, in their clutched fingers, only that which they have given away.' And below that: 'All I've got is me! *Tenez moi donc — et Vive la France!*' Dr. Durant, Dick went into this war in the belief that the only way to reclaim his life was to sacrifice it. Does *that* answer your question?"

There was an utter stillness. It had been a superb fiction, but Hilliard, thinking obliquely of Angela, was only partly sentient of his baseness.

"Thank you," said the Doctor, and glanced at his daughter. "Yes."

"So that you're satisfied on *both* scores."

"Satisfied — it's a weak word," said the Doctor, hushed. "He had the making of a splendid man. I knew his parents and his grandparents. His career in Syracuse hadn't anything to do with his heredity, Mr. Hilliard; it was the result of badly chosen environment. He chose it himself, and he had all a young man's interest in temptation. But when those temptations were removed, when he was free to revert to his family traditions, why, then he could —"

"You're taking it for granted," demanded Hilliard, "that the temptations *were* removed."

"Well — weren't they?"

Hilliard failed to reply promptly; for in meeting the Doctor's gaze he had undergone once more that devastating terror which made him feel that his whole soul was revealed in his eyes, and that his subterfuge was so hopelessly futile that he must be in delirium, even to imagine that it could succeed. He wondered if he could actually be alive. He wondered if this situation *could* exist, save in the mind of a madman. And yet . . .

"No, Dr. Durant. Let me tell you flatly from my personal acquaintance with him — they were not. But he overcame them."

The Doctor nodded repeatedly.

"The more credit to him — You're strengthening us every moment in our belief that Dick was the hero we wanted to think. Because now that we can see that it wasn't purely an instant's recklessness, but —"

Hilliard wavered, and again he wished that he could have sought the accomplishment of his desires by less shameful means.

"It would please me a great deal more, though, Doctor, if you looked at him independently and maybe a little less academically — if you didn't go so far beyond the actual facts."

"How do you mean?"

"Why," said Hilliard, "for one thing, in laying so much stress on his grandparents. Dick was the one who went overseas; his grandparents didn't! And his grandparents didn't go into action on the Western Front singing Stevenson's 'Requiem' at the top of their lungs, and knowing that it was mighty appropriate, and Dick *did!*"

"What?" said Carol, straightening. "What's that?"

"No." The Doctor's negative was quiet, but decisive. "A man doesn't rise to heights of glory without some reason for it, Mr. Hilliard. But a man can resist his inheritance for a good many years, and suddenly stop resisting and revert to his family type. He can do it voluntarily or involuntarily. It's what we call atavism. If you had known Dick's father and mother, and his grandfathers and grandmothers as I did, you'd concede the point without a second's debate." He paused, and smiled sadly. "The pity of it," he said, "is that in spite of his having failed in everything he tried to do in Syracuse, he would have made us proud of him, sooner or later, if he had stayed on here. I'm positive of that."

"Pity!" Hilliard straightened. This was the third time in two days that he had caught the intimation that he could have come home decently and humbly, and been forgiven.

"Not that I pity him for what he accomplished, or what it cost him," warned the Doctor. "I don't; I was very fond of that boy, Mr. Hilliard, but I wouldn't for the world have had him do anything else than what he did. No — but I *do* pity him because he can never know what we think; because he can never know how much we gladly forget; because he can never know why we are proud of him."

"Of course," said Hilliard, still rigid, with the consciousness of tragedy that perhaps he had burned his bridges needlessly, "the best way for you to have showed that was to have told him before he left."

"It was impossible — he hadn't earned it."

Hilliard's pupils were distended.

"You were rather harsh with him, Doctor, as I —"

"We were *just*, Mr. Hilliard."

"But if you recall the gist of Portia's speech . . ."

"I do!" The Doctor regarded him pacifically. "And it's very seldom that mercy is asked to temper justice except after it's become evident that justice is actually going to be just. Let's not deceive ourselves. And let's not put each other in the position either of attacking or defending Dick. It's not the time for that now. He's done all that any man can do, and he was a most lovable boy — most lovable."

Hilliard nervously addressed himself to Carol, who had sat intently listening, without betraying any eagerness to join in the conversation.

"I hope you agree with your father, Miss Durant — that eventually he'd have succeeded in Syracuse?"

"I never doubted it," she said loyally.

And then the three of them fell simultaneously to musing, and for the space of a minute or two there was quiet; the sort of quiet which comes just after the benediction. It was the benediction which Carol had bestowed upon a wretched sinner who sat there wondering how he could ever escape from the toils of his own cleverness.

"How long are you to be in town, Mr. Hilliard?" inquired the Doctor, irrelevantly.

"That I can't say, sir. I had no other errand than this."

"You've never been here before? That is, you haven't friends here?"

He had expected this question, and prepared for it.

"Several years ago," he said casually, "I came to Syracuse half a dozen times one winter — on business. I suppose I could find my way around even now, if I

had to. But comparatively speaking, I'm a stranger."

"You're a business man then, Mr. Hilliard?"

"I told you he was, dear," said Carol.

Hilliard nodded.

"Yes, Dr. Durant. That is,— I was. I have no business connections now. That's why my plans are so uncertain."

Again a heavy silence. Hilliard was cursing the impetuous haste which had caused him to lie himself into an invulnerable network.

"I'm sorry," said the Doctor, rising abruptly, "but I've a consultation at half-past twelve. Thank you again, Mr. Hilliard, for coming to us; you've lightened my heart tremendously. And I'm glad you were a friend of Dick's; this is going to be an era of new and strong friendships, with new ideals for cement. I hope we shall see you again before you go."

"I hope so," said Hilliard, dully. He was whipping his brain to find a way out; but *how* could he explain those manifold, cruel falsehoods which once he had thought to be his retribution?

The Doctor gave him a cordial smile, a parting pressure of the hand, and went out directly, leaving the two young people quite alone.

Hilliard, impelled to go and equally constrained to stay, fidgeted in his vacillation. He was uncomfortable and unhappy, yet curiously enough he had no inclination to depart. He felt chained to his chair; weighted down with indiscretion. He assured himself that he cared not the snap of his finger for Carol Durant; on the contrary, he was intolerant of her very presence; still he lingered, wishing that he hadn't stultified himself. At length she looked across at him, and

for the first time since they had met last night, he detected a glimmer of personal interest in her eyes. It was the tiniest, faintest glimmer imaginable, but it roused him instantly.

"And you really came all the way up here just to be kind to us?" she asked, a trifle forlornly.

"Just to be kind to Dick," he corrected, with keen diplomacy. "Why, yes . . . of course, if I'd known how much you cared — I mean, I —" But the slip was past redemption; and keen diplomacy had dissolved in tactlessness. Carol was winking hard; and Hilliard sprang to his feet. He could never bear to see a woman cry; it was immaterial to him who she was, or what the circumstance; he was powerfully affected — distraught. His single aim was to console her — it was a selfish aim designed primarily to relieve himself.

"But it's easy to see," he said desperately, "why he was so anxious to have me come. I . . . I have twice as many reasons to envy him now, Miss Durant. . . . I really have. And . . . and, unlike your father, I can pity him, too, for —"

"Oh!" she said, smiling tremulously up at him through the misty veil of her tears. "But y-you see, Mr. Hilliard . . . you're quite mistaken . . . I . . . I wasn't pitying Dicky; I was pitying me!"

He bit his lip sharply. No reproach could have gone deeper.

"That *was* your letter, you said?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "It c-*couldn't* have been for any one else! Thank you *so* much . . . for bringing it . . ."

He was trying to analyse the emotions which stirred him. He had told himself over and over again that his

love for her was numb; and yet here he was . . . unsteadily balanced . . . tormented by her grief . . . and lying to her in the next sentence — to protect his previous lies, and to give her what comfort he could.

"I want you to have his war cross, Miss Durant. . . . I think it belongs to you more than to any one else. I . . ." He stopped, and stood irresolute; for she had broken down completely. He watched her, and slowly the blood burned in his cheeks! He thought then that he would gladly have given his life to win a similar cross, if he could have known that she would look upon it so tragically. He tried to order his thoughts, to select his action . . . if he still loved her, he was there to console her; if not . . . he ought in all humanity to console her just the same, even if it took another of those inexcusable deceptions. For an instant he was on the point of succumbing to a wild impulse to blurt out the truth, and take the consequences . . .

He started; for she had motioned to him — motioned him away. He hesitated . . . was it love, or repentance, or only his disquiet to see a woman cry? She motioned again, hysterically . . .

Hilliard's brain snapped; Syracuse had sung his praise too late. The Doctor with his isms and dissections was too late — Carol herself was too late with tears. His jaws came together; he glanced at her once more, and then, in obedience to her gesture, he turned, and tiptoed quietly from the room. The front door closed quietly behind him. The danger of succumbing was over, and, he believed, permanently and yet . . .

"Even Stephen!" he whispered as he went down the steps.

But on the sidewalk, when he realized that he should

never have another opportunity to break the thread of his chicanery, he had few of the musings of a hero. Instead, he knew the first faint debility of a timid criminal. He was committed definitely to a living death. Confession now was impossible; his watchfulness must be to avoid discovery.

A passer-by wondered idly what this saintly-looking person was muttering under his breath. His face was radiantly placid, but his shoulders were swearing.

VIII

BRING a problem, a tremendous, highly-ramified problem, into any man's life, and if his powers of concentration are strongly enough developed, his world separates into two parts — the problem, and a perfect blank. And to Hilliard, whose life had suddenly become the apotheosis of introspection, there was a period of twenty-four hours during which he scarcely knew what he did, or what he said.

He could vaguely remember, afterwards, certain unrelated occurrences, but that was all. He could remember going back to Angela, and saying, in effect: "Well, I did it!" and he had a hazy impression that she had thanked him with rather incoherent extravagance, and made him violently uncomfortable. In the afternoon, he had set out for a solitary walk, and had returned at dusk, with a splitting headache and no appetite for dinner — unable to state where he had been, and indifferent to Mr. Cullen's declaration, based on a fragment or two of Hilliard's recollection of landmarks, that he must have walked all of twenty miles.

He had, next, a dislocated sort of memory of an evening on the veranda, with Mr. Cullen doing most of the talking, and doing it cheerfully and sticking with great zeal to shop-talk. Hilliard had maintained a steady willingness to suffer in silence, and had smiled interminably at Angela, who thawed visibly beneath this evidence of friendliness.

He hadn't slept, but had passed the night in a sensi-

tized form of coma, and had reported for breakfast in such palpable distress that Angela had mothered him to her heart's content, and Mr. Cullen had brilliantly diagnosed his ailment as nerve-fag from the disintegrating nature of his errand, and, prescribing complete rest and recreation for a day or two, shown the utmost hospitality, and commanded Angela to drive him to Skaneateles and cheer him up.

Angela had complied; and Angela had found that he was immersed in a Problem, and guessed what it was. Her guess was fully as correct as it had any right to be (she deduced that his interview with Carol had completely demoralized him) and she adored him for it. In addition, she was practical; as soon as she had discovered his need of recuperation, she had taken him home, and ordered him sternly to lie down and close his eyes, and not bother about anything.

He had obeyed inertly, and had been wakened by the advent of three pert young reporters, who mistook his apathy for the diffidence of greatness, and interviewed him deferentially for fifteen minutes, after which Angela had expelled them, and treated Hilliard like a small boy, or an invalid. And he had obeyed her gratefully, even to the extent of using menthol.

Then, thoroughly worn out, he had slept. He had closed his eyes when the sun was hardly past its zenith; he opened them in the violet light of late afternoon. His brain was clear, his muscles were placid; the events of the past twenty-four hours were as evasively thin as the plot of a two-days'-old dream.

IX

AT six o'clock that afternoon Hilliard, freshly bathed and dressed, strolled lazily down to the garden behind the Cullen house in search of mild diversion. It wasn't a large garden, but what there was of it had charm and background, as well as seclusion. There was a rectangle of asters and foxglove and Canterbury bells, and within it, a square of close-cropped lawn bordered by mignonettes, and in the centre of that, a slender marble fountain whose thin little jet seemed always to be struggling to rise just another inch higher than it possibly could. And there beside the fountain, on the grass, stood Angela, a vision of summer daintiness in a little rose-coloured frock of gingham, with white little frills of fascination at the neck and sleeves. Her own colour, too, was roseate, and, as she waved her hand to Hilliard, her eyes were sparkling.

"Hello!" she said. "How's the invalid?"

"Ashamed," he responded, truthfully enough. "There isn't an apology *half* big enough to —"

"Please don't!" she interrupted.

"But *think* of it!" he protested vigorously. "First I saddle myself on you in this outrageous fashion, and then I —"

"Hush!" said Angela, with mock sternness. "Or I'll be ashamed of *you*. . . . Feeling better?"

"Yes, but —"

"Careful!" Her tone changed subtly. "You don't seem to realize that we owe you something, too, Mr. Hil-

liard. Men don't know how to take care of themselves — that's what women are for! You just stop fussing, and behave yourself."

"You're kinder to me than I deserve," said Hilliard, and meant it literally.

She blushed at that, and bent down to pluck a purple aster for him.

"Perhaps that's because we like you so much," she said, and gave him the aster. "Shall I fix it for you?"

"Please do!" He watched her closely, and took an esthetic pleasure in the sight. Her fingers bungled at the lapel, and she blushed again; her skin was exquisitely fair and translucent; Hilliard marvelled at it. "There!" She gave the flower a final touch. "Now you're all dressed up!" She dusted her fingers prettily, and smiled up at him.

Hilliard looked down at her, and smiled in response. He was thinking what a child she was — how the irrepressible hoyden of two years ago was merely veneered by the first coat of higher education, which is general deportment. He was thinking that by all the precedents, she should have had a kiss in barter for the boutonnière; she had well earned it; and the reward would have been as natural as her coquetry.

"Thank you, my dear," said Hilliard, with an infinitesimal sigh which was partly for the veneering, and partly because she had recovered so swiftly from her sorrowing for the man who stood beside her. Still, he argued, grief is short-lived in the best of us, and she had outgrown Morgan in his absence. But her grief had been so sweet to him!

She was beheading a stray nasturtium as she stood half turned from him, her head drooping.

"I don't like you at all — now," she declared, without convincing emphasis. "You said that — and you looked — just as though I'm a little girl! And I'm sure I've *acted* pretty differently to you. Haven't I?"

"Perhaps that's the way I intended to look," he said. "At any rate, it was meant for a compliment."

"I wish I thought so," she protested, pouting adorably.

Hilliard, who was completely captivated by her luscious youthfulness, spoke in the same tone he had used before.

"You'll have to take my solemn oath for it. . . . And only see how you've spoiled that nasturtium!"

Her lips curved reluctantly at first, and then in swift surrender to him; her delicious smile was part shy consciousness, and part the spontaneity of eager friendship; she glanced at him out of the corner of one eye, an ingénue coquette, and he was satisfied, then, that some of her sorrow for Morgan had dissolved, because it left a space in her sentiments which Hilliard himself could fill. Also, she had never coquetted with Morgan; she hadn't known how.

"I'll take your word for it, then," she said, and gave him a tantalizing glimpse of her piquant features. "And I suppose you think you're a regular patriarch!" This was provocative — slightly impertinent. Hilliard was inwardly convulsed.

"Old enough to be respected, anyway," he said. There was a bantering gravity in his voice, but also a trace of something serious. Her rejoinder was in precisely the same spirit.

"Oh, but I *never* respect people — never in the least."

"No? Not even ministers, or movie-actors, or mil-

lionaires?" The relief from the strain of yesterday was incalculable; nothing could have been more revivifying than this harmless conflict of words; he could feel his whole soul relaxing under the influence of it.

"Not a respect!" she said, with an odd little combination of defiance and humour. "Men are just babies. That's all they are; just babies. I have to laugh at 'em."

"Indeed! So you're laughing at me, are you, too? I'll admit I gave you something of an opportunity."

"Not yet — but I will sometime, of *course*. And I wish you wouldn't make fun of my trying to take care of you — that's different. You needed it."

Hilliard burst out laughing, and laughed immoderately.

"If eventually, why not now?" he inquired, still convulsed. To his astonishment there were sudden depths in those big delft-blue eyes of hers: and her answer was made without the least remaining vestige of humour.

"Well," she said, "I can't put it in words exactly, but so far, you *are* different. I haven't laughed at you yet because the one thing in the world I *don't* laugh at is experience. I . . . I *can't!* And you look as though you'd had just heaps and heaps. So, I won't laugh at you until I've found you out. And it won't be when you're tired, or sick, or something, either."

Hilliard shook his head.

"Don't you know any one else who's had what you call experience?"

Angela shook *her* head. "Not like yours. I feel all the time as though you'd *lived* so much more than anybody else I've ever met. It isn't anything you do or anything you say — it's just there. Perhaps it's the

war. Or . . . you've travelled a lot, haven't you? I know you have. That may be it; that's what counts most."

"Yes," he said indifferently, "I've chased rainbows pretty much all over the world. It's been a busy life, Angela, but looking back on it I don't believe it's been half as happy as yours."

"As *mine!*" she gasped, and the shock had driven every atom of self-consciousness out of her. "Why, whatever do you *mean?*"

"Just that," said Hilliard. "What else?"

"And you've been everywhere and seen everything — and you expect to say that and have me *believe* it?"

"No — but that doesn't make it any less true. You don't get happiness by doing what you want to; you get it by doing what you particularly *don't* want to. That's preachy, of course, but it happens to be true. Honestly. Cross my heart."

"You actually think I'm *happy* here, do you?"

"Why, aren't you?" he asked, genuinely taken aback.

In her confusion, she had moved very near to him; her flushed little face, lifted to his, was almost expressionless with incredulity. Her breath was quickened, and the colour in her cheeks was indescribably lovely. Hilliard found himself regarding her not as an old and tested playmate, but as a new and, as yet, an unfathomed friend.

"You think I could be happy vegetating in this — this miserable old *dump?*"

"What!" said Hilliard. "You don't like it?"

"*This?*" Angela's voice was girlishly shrill with repugnance. "Why, I *loathe* it! Why Mr. Hilliard,

I've never been *anywhere!* Never anywhere at all! Just Syracuse — cloudy and sooty and cold and rainy and slushy and humid — and you've been all over the whole wide world — and then you compare —" Her voice broke. "You compare your life with this! I — *I'm* living in a horrid old prison; *you're free!*"

He had a strong intuition that Angela had been reading a book; but he forbore to ask her.

"I should think you'd be very contented here," he began condolingly.

"What with?" she flared and Hilliard was reminded of nothing so much as a fluffy kitten grown belligerent.

"Why, my dear child, your father gives you everything you want, and —"

"That shows how little you know about it!" she flamed. "I don't want to hang around here all my life! there's nothing here he can give me! I want to go abroad — everywhere. I want some *experiences. I* want to travel, too. London, and Paris, and Russia, and Japan, and Honolulu, and Bermuda, and India, and Egypt, and —"

"But the war, my dear — the war!" She drew herself up with immense dignity.

"Well, I could be a nurse or something, couldn't I? Everybody says I've got magnetic hands!"

"Haven't you friends enough to keep you amused?" he asked, avoiding the complication of an answer.

"Friends? Oh, in a way —"

"No nice young men to play with — and laugh at?"

"No," she denied. "Not many. And the only one I ever really cared much of anything about — until a little while ago — was — was Dick Morgan."

Hilliard began to feel a tightening in his throat.

"But he was ever so much older than you are, wasn't he?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "He was almost middle-aged." Hilliard started. "But — he understood. That's all — he just understood."

"Understood what, Angela?"

She was plucking intently at the frills of one of her sleeves.

"My wanting to go to places, and see things. And have — sort of adventures. And —" She glanced up suddenly, and her pupils swelled. "Why — why, you understand, too — *don't* you?" she said breathlessly.

Hilliard's expression was unaltered.

"How do you know that?"

"By the way you're looking at me —" In absolute unconsciousness of self, she had seized a lapel of his coat in either hand; she was standing almost on tiptoe in her endeavour to read his thoughts. She was a lovely, restless, highly excited child, and Hilliard was not at all immune to beauty. "What have *you* done?" she demanded imperatively, wide-eyed. "How did *you* do it? How did *you* get away from things? You *have* done it — I know you have — you've got the same sort of far-off look in your eyes that Dicky had when he used to tell me stories!" Her eyes were liquid wonder. "That's why I liked him so much. And you remind me of him a lot. Tell me!"

"Do I?" Hilliard was quaking internally; he struggled to break the continuity of her imagination. "Do you know what you remind *me* of?"

Her vanity refused to yield to the suggestion, and Hilliard trembled at the thought of what a ghastly

anticlimax might result from any recognition now.

"On the outside, you're not like him at all," she said, "but you give me an awfully creepy feeling when you look at me like that. It's like — transmigration of souls, you know. As though . . . as though Dicky sent me a message through your eyes . . . to go with the one he sent by your hands. It's *awfully* creepy!"

Hilliard tried to laugh.

"I don't believe in supernatural things; do you?"

She released him, but lost none of her attentiveness.

"I never did before," she said.

Hilliard found himself unable to tear his eyes from her: the danger fascinated him. All his early confidence had gone unstable, and he was shivering at the prospect of detection. Nevertheless, he knew that this was no time to compromise; he must brazen it out.

"You don't mean to say that you do now?"

"But it's all so queer," she said, perplexed. "You're so unlike him, and yet. . . . I wish I could describe it, Mr. Hilliard. If I'd had my back turned when you spoke to me, I . . . I think I'd have called you 'Dick' without ever thinking about it. I suppose I seem awfully silly to you."

"No." And in fact, he was afraid of her because she was so exactly the opposite. "You're only very sensitive, Angela." He saw the chance to capitalize her doubt, and seized it avidly. "Perhaps it's because your friend and I had the same sort of penchant for adventures."

She shook her head. "No, that can't be it — loads of people have *that*. Why, even Dad does — and still he can't see why *I* should."

"Somehow I hadn't thought of him as an adven-

turer," said Hilliard lightly. He was as shaken as a man who has been snatched back from vertigo on the edge of a precipice.

"Oh, but he *is!* He's too busy to go and do it, but right here in town he does some of the funniest things —"

"For instance?" Hilliard dared to breathe again.

"Why," said Angela, "he can't very well go off buccaneering, you know, but any business that's sort of romantic, he just simply can't keep his hands off of! He's put money in oil wells and submarines and he's backed a plan to raise a ship that was sunk early in the war, and he —"

"Your father," said Hilliard, smiling in limp relief, "must be a very rich man!"

"Oh, he is!" said Angela carelessly. "And if he could go and superintend those things himself, he'd be perfectly crazy about it. He's a bigger baby than anybody else I know! But when *I* say a word —"

"He doesn't respond?"

"*No!* He says I'm silly! He says it's spring fever, or something. And he's actually *scouting* for things to do all the time himself! He's thinking about putting some money in a gold mine this minute. And going out to stay in Arizona two or three months and watch it! He says it's business, but *I* know it's Arizona. He —"

"He is, is he!" Hilliard frowned slightly. "If he's interested in mining, I could give him some good advice myself."

She was instantly alert.

"Why, do you own a gold mine?" Her tone was almost reverential.

"No, but I own part of a copper mine."

"Oh, I wish I could see it!" she said, with exquisite envy. "I wish I *could.* Where is it?"

"Montana. And perhaps you can, sometime."

"*Honestly?*" The veneering over her eager youthfulness was very thin.

"I'd love to have you. It's in a beautiful country, too."

"Could . . . could Dad be in it, too?"

"Why," said Hilliard, "I'm not trying to sell anything to —"

"Oh, I know, but he's *crazy* about those things!" She clasped her hands in fervent and premature excitement. "And so am I. Now you just listen! It isn't as though he *weren't* interested in —"

"But, my dear child!" he protested, humorously. "Your father wouldn't bother his head about *my* schemes, even if I'd let him. He —"

"But he *would!* That's just where you're wrong! Dad'll bite at anything!" She was belatedly conscious of the slip, and blushed furiously. "I didn't mean that — *you* know."

"Of course," said Hilliard.

"I mean, he's just like a boy — about schemes and things. Adventures. And you'll talk to him, won't you? Please? To please me?"

"Why," said Hilliard, "I don't exactly know what you want me to talk to him about, but —"

"Why, about your mine, and mining in general, and . . . don't you *see?* Don't you see where *I* come in? Don't you see what a lot you could do for me? Aren't you willing to do even that much? Couldn't we *all* go out there sometime — couldn't we?"

"Well —" Hilliard was slightly off his balance at the unexpected aid flung towards him.

"Hark!" she said, with her head to one side in a singularly birdlike attitude. "There's the Packard now! There's Dad! Come on!"

Impetuously, she caught his hand, but her intended flight was cut short when Hilliard remained stockstill. She glanced back inquiringly; Hilliard smiled down at her. He continued to hold her hand; she stared at it, and then at Hilliard in some bewilderment. And presently he lifted it to his lips; and Angela, equally alarmed and transported, blushed still more rosily, and backed away.

"I didn't give it to you for that," she said, with ingenuous primness.

"I know you didn't," he conceded. "But —" Here her wide and expressive eyes met his own, and clung to them. "But let me give you now the one — *he* sent you," said Hilliard soberly. And kissed her hand again, as though it had been a queen's.

As they started up the incline towards the house, he told himself that he should have to be very cautious with Angela after this. He knew, from the way she had looked at him, that Continental courtesies had heretofore been lacking from her young experience.

X

ORDINARILY, Mr. Cullen was satisfied to bring a single evening paper home with him, and when he laid it on the hall table, it was generally creased down the financial page; but tonight, he brought two, and each of them had wrinkles across the market reports and were folded so as to feature the departments devoted to local news. The *Journal* had beaten the *Herald* by two sticks and a subhead, but the *Herald* had honoured Dicky Morgan with a kindly editorial and both papers had stated explicitly where Hilliard was making his headquarters. Mr. Cullen had a broad-gauge disposition, and Mr. Cullen had prestige which nothing short of a cataclysm could disturb, but Mr. Cullen was so nearly one hundred percent normal that if The Average Man ever really existed, outside of political arguments and tables of statistics, Mr. Cullen might almost have passed for a specimen of this interesting genus. Therefore, it stands to reason that Mr. Cullen wasn't wholly displeased, even under such melancholy auspices, to be included in the spotlight of publicity. Indeed, he would have been seriously offended if he hadn't been mentioned at least once in each paper; and this is no more a reflection upon his vanity than the fact that he cherished a lively anticipation for what the *Post-Standard* was going to say about the case tomorrow morning. It was merely a matter of local prerogative: and he was entitled to it. It was a mark of his standing in the community — His Name in Print.

Nevertheless, there was a fly in the ointment — not very much of a fly, to be sure, but still appreciable; and after all, it isn't the size of the invader that counts. Mr. Cullen was generous; Mr. Cullen was hospitable; but Mr. Cullen was also the tiniest bit of a snob — not a carping, contemptuous, supercilious snob, but a healthy, hearty, open-spirited snob, frank in his liking for the things he liked,— and one of them was to *be* somebody, and have the neighbours know it. He liked to fraternize with important men; he liked to see his name in the paper now and then; he liked to feel superior — just one harmless little degree more consequential — than his next-door neighbour. And the neighbour, of course, had to share this conviction, or there wasn't any purpose in it.

And Mr. Cullen, with all this ingenuous weakness for prominence, hadn't known until the evening papers told him so, hadn't even suspected (although now he was trying busily to persuade himself that he had suspected it all along, from one thing and another) that his guest was a mining engineer of international reputation, and independently wealthy to boot. It was enough to discomfit any host! It was enough to annoy any man, whether average or not, who prided himself (and most of us do) that he had unusual discernment, and was a Good Judge of Human Nature. That is — it was enough to irritate any trustworthy individual who didn't realize that the avid young reporters had simply taken Hilliard's word for it, and scurried back to their offices to turn out readable copy as fast as they conveniently could.

Curiosity gnawed at him, for he was a man who liked to get his data at first hand, and not to have to

take it in the form of stew, after he had missed the original roast; he liked the authority of confidential information. And so, when he met the pair of young people at the head of the garden, he began to fire away pointblank at Hilliard; and this was barely after the greetings, and a question as to the state of Hilliard's health, and before Angela had found an opportunity to get a word in edgewise. It wasn't altogether an opportune moment, but the Average Man never stands on ceremony.

"Understand you're a mining man, Mr. Hilliard," he said, pleasantly.

"I used to be," said Hilliard, with a glance for Angela. "I've retired. I thought I told you so the first night I was here."

"Oh, yes — you did say something about it, but —" Mr. Cullen laughed with the fulness of one who has unearthed secrets. "It took some of our bright young newspaper crowd to ferret out the facts. You're too modest — that's what the matter with you!"

As Hilliard smiled in deprecation, Angela, crowing triumphantly, snatched for the papers.

"Where is it?" she cried. "Where . . . oh!" And relapsed into beatific calm, devouring the none too conservative paragraphs with all her might. The cold-typed repetition of the well-known story sobered her considerably; still, it was for Hilliard's and her father's names that she gloated; and as for the panegyric of Morgan, that was only an added garland to the wreath which was already his.

"Russian and English syndicate, wasn't it?" asked Mr. Cullen, not too absorbed in the answer to refrain from giving the garden his usual brief inspection, and finding it attractive.

"Yes," said Hilliard. "English and Russian."

Mechanically, he began to rehearse the technical subtleties which he hadn't expected to find use for within a brace of fortnights. It was well, however, to be prepared; and the time to plant the seed of desire is when the prospect is willing.

"Mighty interesting game — mining," said Cullen. "Let's wander down by the fountain; shall we? . . . I don't know why it is, but it sort of fascinates me — guess it does everybody. More romance in it than most lines." Here Angela looked up sharply, and gurgled with wicked satisfaction, and sent a lifted eye-brow signal across to Hilliard.

"Yes," said Hilliard, "but there's more tragedy too. I suppose that's the law of compensation getting to work. Big profits call for big risks."

This was for sand in Cullen's eyes; and it had its effect.

"Oh, but the ratio's the same in almost any business, Mr. Hilliard, isn't it? It's about the same theory. Savings banks pay three to four percent, but they never made a man rich yet. But copper has!"

"I'll have to admit," said Hilliard lightly, "that the odds are on the side of the experts. But as for the romance —" He smiled at Angela and wondered if he dared begin so soon to build up the framework of his mission. "I've been telling Angela that it's mostly hard work. Once in a while you *do* run into something lurid, of course — romantic, if you want to call it so. I remember one bit out of my own experience." Angela had dropped the papers, and was listening as closely as her father. "A few years ago some friends of mine bought up an old abandoned property out in the Butte

region; bought it for a song, and it was a very quiet peaceful little song at that, because metals had been dull, and — to continue the metaphor — my friends weren't in particularly good voice just then. But after they'd taken title, they realized that they'd only sung the first verse to the song, and there were a lot more verses and a pretty strenuous chorus. There was a shaft to be unwatered and a lot of timber-work to be done; they were in for a big expense, and their credit had tucks in it, and the outlook wasn't any too rosy. But thirty yards from the main workings there was a fairish sort of tunnel, with the start of a winze — that's a blind shaft running down obliquely from a horizontal tunnel — and it pointed straight towards the main shaft, and it occurred to them that they could continue that winze another few feet, strike their main shaft at about the hundred and fifty foot level, and save a lot of labour and expense that way by getting a clean approach to the shaft instead of taking a lot of bother with it in its decrepit condition. Well, they began to go down that winze, and inside of ten feet they struck a brand new and unsuspected vein — there hadn't been any outcrop showing; it was sheer, unadulterated luck. *Then* they had credit — they certainly did! To make a long story short, they pawned their futures, and begged and borrowed every penny they could lay their hands on, and they developed that property to the last cent, and when they had perhaps two hundred thousand or so tons of four percent copper in sight, and there were indicated ore reserves of another half a million tons, they sold that property to a group of New Yorkers for an utterly phenomenal price, with-

out ever having so much as *touched* the original shaft for which they'd bought the property!"

"Ouch!" said Cullen, and "Goodness!" said Angela.

"And," said Hilliard, smiling reminiscently, "if the original owners had pushed that winze for a couple of days more than they did, or if my friends hadn't decided to go at the problem in exactly that way . . . well, as I say, what's one man's romance is another man's tragedy. My friends got their investment back in something less than four months, and after that it was all velvet. And the selling price was in the neighbourhood of two hundred times what they'd paid for it. That's mining history, Mr. Cullen." And indeed it was — and the only fabrication about it was Hilliard's claim of friendship for the lucky owners. This, as he assured himself, was salesman's license — every successful operator is a "friend" of any salesman.

Cullen nodded thoughtfully; his eyes were very bright. Angela was alternately regarding him with indulgent pity, and sending I-told-you-so messages to Hilliard.

"Where was this — in Montana?"

"Silverbow County. Near Butte. Yes, there *is* romance in that country, Mr. Cullen. It's in every tree and every rock, and in every hill and valley and under the ground. And I'm afraid I'm just enough of a realist to find most of my own under the surface."

"To save my life," said Cullen, "I can't help thinking of that region as a Mark Twain sort of country — sombreros and six-shooters and Vigilantes and stage coach hold-ups and gold dust as a medium of exchange.

I know it's childish, but I've never been out there, and it's hard to get over what we learned at school." He surveyed his vaunted garden less arrogantly; the fountain, which in his moments of complacence had all the attributes of a geyser for him, was suddenly a feeble faucet, and the tidy lawn was no more seductive than a window-box.

"The up-to-date schoolbooks," said Hilliard, laughing, "have a good many changes in them. The West of the early eighties is all gone, the atmosphere is all gone, the old-style miners are all gone; you used to see some picturesque sights even ten years ago, but nowadays you best realize how the industry has changed when you see a couple of pals hunting for work in a Ford. Drive up to a camp, ask for a job, get it, park the Ford, take the tools out of the delivery body on behind, and pitch in. And you can imagine the other changes that accompany that one. Of course, that's especially typical of Arizona, but we get it in Montana, too. I'm not saying that the colour has gone out entirely, because it hasn't, but in the old days the West was the West, and now it's moving East as fast as it conveniently can, so that if you want to get the pure spirit of it, as it is today, you'll have to go down to Wall Street. That's where it lives."

"Mining — mining!" mused Mr. Cullen. "Sounds adventurous just to say it!" He gazed fixedly at the tenuous fountain.

"And no industry is less understood — even by intelligent men, Mr. Cullen. As a matter of fact, the public doesn't even understand most of the commonest terms. The buying public doesn't even know what

it is buying. That's why it's so easy to sell worthless stock."

"Oh, Mr. Hilliard!"

"For instance," he said. "I spoke of a certain number of tons of ore in sight, and that's one of the very commonest expressions in a fake prospectus. I suppose you know you couldn't see it, don't you?"

"Why, no!" said Mr. Cullen, blankly. "Couldn't I?"

"You might actually see a few thousand dollars' worth."

"Why," said Angela, surprisedly. "I thought it stuck right out on the walls! In gobs! And you knocked it off with a pickaxe! And shovelled it up!"

"Not exactly that," said Hilliard, kindly. "Sometimes you go at an ore body with steam shovels, and other times you don't. But when you remember that three or four pounds of copper to every hundred pounds of rock means a very handsome profit, if your costs aren't excessive, you have some idea of how little you could knock off a wall. No — you tear down the whole mass. You go at it wholesale."

"What I meant by romance," said Mr. Cullen, "wasn't necessarily luck. And besides, this yarn you've just told us doesn't illustrate what I call a business proposition. What I'm trying to get at is that you've got an occupation that isn't a cut-and-dried one like the average. There's breadth to it — vision. There's drama. There's the outdoor side to it. There's —"

"Don't forget," Hilliard warned him, "that I purposely gave you that illustration, and I think you've missed the moral. It *was* a business proposition. My

friends bought the mine for the values they knew were there. They'd have made money if they'd gone ahead unwatering and timbering and developing the old shaft — so that it wasn't all bull luck, not by any means. And I claim that the romance and the drama and the excitement is in the combination of business sense with that wonderful possibility of accident. You don't go in at random; you use your best judgment, and expect about ten percent on your money — and it's the chance of getting a thousand percent that keeps the game alive. Some men don't even get the ten . . . mighty few ever get the thousand. I'm satisfied, and more than satisfied, that the gods have been good to me, and put me somewhere in between."

Mr. Cullen's interest in the garden had dwindled to zero.

"I suppose for the people on the inside," he said, "a mining proposition is just as safe and business-like as anything else. And as you say, when luck's with it, it's unbeatable. The trouble comes in knowing when a mine's a mine, and when it's a swindle, and I guess you have to be a metallurgical shark to know that anyway. But the way things have been going for the last year or two, with all this speculation in the metals, and all the fortunes that have been made, sort of set me to thinking that with good advice, you —"

"I beg your pardon," said Hilliard quickly. "There's been mighty little speculation in metals, Mr. Cullen; but there's been a tremendous amount of speculation in *stock*. The difference between West and East; the difference between insider and outsider; the difference between the capitalist and the gambler is this — the East, the outsider and the gambler buy stock;

the West, the insider and the capitalist buy *mines*. Buy them outright and develop them first and exploit them afterwards. If they're good, the West keeps them to itself and pockets the profits; if they're shaky, the West sells stocks to the East, and gets its profit that way, and calmly steps out from under. And more than that, sir, the average man who buys mining stock doesn't know what he's getting into. The public doesn't realize how much it's paying for what it gets. The art and science of underwriting . . ."

"Now you just wait a second," interrupted Angela, who had been fidgeting and playing with her wrist watch. "Dad — Mr. Hilliard! This is awfully interesting, but dinner's in just a few minutes, and —"

"Plenty of time," said Cullen, waving her off. "Plenty of time! Go ahead, Mr. Hilliard. This is too good to miss. Smoke a cigarette for an appetizer?"

"Thank you." Hilliard, having decided to take complete advantage of the present opportunity, marshalled his salient details as he held a match for his host. "Well, perhaps I can show you best by an actual example. I'm out of the game entirely, as I said, but I was invited a day or two ago to join a New York syndicate in financing a property I appraised myself in 1914. It's in the same district as the romantic mine I've just told you about; I don't mean to imply that it'll have the same sort of history, but it looks like a good, substantial thing. It's owned at present by four boys with a shoe-string apiece. They can't finance it themselves, so they need help, and they've come to Wall Street and whispered their secret through a megaphone. Now suppose, just to make it clear all around, that you and I and Angela are to form a syndicate to under-

write the company." He was sustained by the reflection that even though he came in the guise of a mountebank, there was nothing dishonourable about the wares he had brought to sell.

"Ooh!" said Angela, joyously. "Thanks!"

Simultaneously her father gave her a little frown of affectionate remonstrance, and Hilliard gave her a little smile of affectionate esteem.

"Now the boys who own it," said Hilliard, "are in such straits that we can practically dictate our own terms. I don't mean to imply that we'd take too great an advantage of them, but it's a plain case of supply and demand, and we're naturally interested in a bargain. The first thing to do, before we decide any of the details, is to look over the situation and find out exactly what it is we're asked to buy. So we go over the mine very carefully, and find that although it isn't actually producing any copper just yet, because the owners ran out of money before they could get that far, it has enough ore reserves to guarantee at least ten thousand tons a year for twenty years, provided the necessary equipment is bought and put into operation. That tonnage, with the price of copper where it is now, — around thirty cents,— and the cost of production what it is now, and other factors what they are now would eventually mean a net profit of about a quarter of a million dollars a year. So first we have these present owners organize a corporation, capitalized at two million dollars."

Cullen smoked violently, and looked puzzled.

"You're getting out of my depth. How do you arrive at *that?*"

"That's so as to insure ten percent dividends. And

the mine can pay ten percent, *provided* we can arrange to get the capital. You see, Mr. Cullen, a copper mine isn't like a factory, and you can't figure it the same way, because a factory runs on indefinitely, and if you simply replace the machinery whenever it wears out, there's nothing to prevent the same plant from keeping on making the same sort of product for a hundred years. But every pound of ore you take out of a mine leaves that much less for the future, and eventually your ore's going to be all gone. And if this particular mine is going to be exhausted in about twenty years, it stands to reason that it's being exhausted at the rate of one-twentieth, or five percent, a year. You must take that always into consideration. And therefore, every stockholder is entitled to get back at least five percent of his money each year to cover that depreciation, in addition to whatever he ought to get for ordinary profits, which is *another* five percent. Otherwise —"

"Oh! I see!" cried Angela.

"Prove it!" commanded Hilliard indulgently.

"Why, if the company just paid five percent for twenty years, and at the end of it, your ore was all gone, the people would only just have got their money back, and they wouldn't have made any real profit at all!"

"Exactly!" said Hilliard. "So the company must pay at least ten percent — half for bona-fide dividends and half for depreciation."

"Oho!" said Cullen, opening his eyes. "Is that why the big mining companies pay such big dividends? I thought it was all clear profit!"

"No, sir. That's what I told you ten minutes ago —

the average investor doesn't know what he's buying. The dividends of a mining company have to be very high to be attractive at all; they have to make good that depreciation. Well, we make the boys incorporate, as I said, for two million dollars, on which we can pay ten percent. I'll show you what the set-up looks like." He wrote on the back of an old envelope: CAPITALIZATION $2,000,000 — 200,000 shares at $10 each.

"Now, the company (and you must remember that so far we haven't any official connection with it), agrees to take over the property, and pay the present owners for it with 80,000 shares of stock, and it also agrees to sell to you and Angela and me the other 120,000 shares at a dollar apiece, or $120,000, of which we agree to pay half in cash, and the balance in about ninety days."

"Is that all they get?" demanded Angela. "Why, how stingy!"

"But — it's robbery!" gasped Mr. Cullen.

"Hardly that," said Hilliard, smiling. "The boys haven't a penny, and they've got to raise money or the mine's no good to them, because they couldn't develop it anyway. We've agreed to provide the money, and we'll let them manage the business just as before. Besides, don't forget that they've been paid by the corporation for their interest with 80,000 shares of stock, and that what we do later will make it worth a fortune. And don't think that the $120,000 we've promised to pay goes to the boys personally, because it doesn't; it goes into the treasury of the company to be used for machinery and labour." He wrote again.

Stock Paid to Individual Owners	80,000 shares
Stock Sold to Syndicate	120,000 shares
Total	200,000 shares

"Now, then," he said, "we own 120,000 shares for which we've paid, and agreed to pay $120,000. That is, we've underwritten these shares for a dollar apiece, and paid down half the amount. I ask you to remember that on our first conservative estimate, the value of each share was ten dollars: but the value isn't there until our brains and our work and our investment has created it. Now let's begin to look at it from the public's standpoint. Here's a mine with plenty of ore; and a company with cash enough on hand to begin producing at a profit very soon — although nobody pretends that it's actually producing *now*. It has $60,000 in the bank, and another $60,000 due in ninety days. It can go ahead and contract for machinery and workmen, and it does, and you and Angela and I are still letting the former owners manage it, but since we're in control of the stock, we either elect ourselves as directors, or elect other people whose names carry weight with the public, so that we can always direct the general policy, and see that it's careful and conservative. From every angle, then, financial and moral, the venture looks like a big success. So you and Angela and I go to a good broker, or to a group of brokers, and make them a proposition. We convince them of the value we have; we let them send their own engineers out to make a report, and as evidence of good faith, we pay all their expenses; we let them go over our books.

Everything's fair and square and above-board. And we agree that these brokers will take some of this stock off our hands to sell to the public (because they've got a selling organization already established, and plenty of customers who look to them for advice) and it's agreed that they'll pay us — say, four dollars a share for what they think they can sell. Now we're getting down to simple arithmetic." He gestured, as a schoolmaster gestures. "How many shares have we got to place with the brokers, at four dollars apiece, to get back the $60,000 we've already advanced, and the additional $60,000 that's due in three months?"

"Thirty thousand," said Angela briskly.

"Thirty thousand," corroborated her father. At this juncture, a bell was ringing persistently from the direction of the house, but no one noticed it.

"Right!" Hilliard made the notation on the back of the envelope. "And as an added inducement, we'd have to give the brokers a rather long option on some more stock — they insist on it, and it's customary. If they take up the option, we're paid cash, and if they don't, we'll keep the stock for ourselves anyway. Also, we arrange to pay all our own lawyers, and experts, and all the commissions, and so on, in stock, to save cash. That's customary, too, when the proposition's so evidently honest. The brokers then do some advertising, send out their circulars and bulletins and pamphlets to their customers, and sell that stock to the public for anywhere from six to eight dollars a share. That is, the public is glad enough, when the prospect's a good one, to pay seven or eight dollars (because every share's going to be worth ten) for what cost the broker four dollars, and cost us one dollar — which we've already

got back from the brokers, and we've still got the half of those 120,000 shares of ours left besides! So here's the final balance sheet!" He hastily totalled the list, and handed it over to Cullen.

Capitalization $2,000,000 — 200,000 shares at $10.	
Stock Paid to Individual Owners	80,000 shares
Stock Sold to Syndicate for $120,000.....	120,000 shares
Total	200,000 shares
Of Our	120,000 shares
We sell to brokers.....	30,000 shares
Leaving	90,000 shares
We give brokers a 2 year option at $5 apiece on..	20,000 shares
Leaving	70,000 shares
We pay lawyers, experts, etc.	10,000 shares
Leaving	60,000 shares

"And that balance of 60,000 shares," he said, "belongs to us three. The brokers are making a market and establishing a price; and in order to protect themselves, they can't afford to let the stock sell under the price *they're* charging the public — because if they did, the public wouldn't buy up the rest of what the

brokers have to sell, but they'd buy it in the open market. So the brokers protect the market, by what's considered perfectly legitimate means, although some folks call it manipulation, and they keep the price up by main strength until the first dividend is paid, and after that they don't have to worry, because now everybody sees what a good thing it is, and flocks in to take advantage of it, and the quotations jump up to twelve or fifteen. Everybody's made money; the brokers have made theirs; the public's making theirs, and when the price is right the syndicate sells in open market the 60,000 shares it had left, *and you and Angela and I have each made a quarter of a million dollars without really risking a single cent!* Because, as I said, we got our money back right at the beginning."

Angela, who had followed the intricacies of the set-up with the liveliest interest, turned pale; and Cullen's jaw sagged. Hilliard, returning his fountain pen to his pocket with the utmost nonchalance, had no more apprehension left in him, for Cullen had swallowed the bait whole. Cullen, Average Man that he was,— a good enough manager of his own small enterprise, but woefully ignorant of the financial world at large — Cullen coughed raspingly.

"It's a very pretty picture, but suppose the market never goes up?"

"It will as soon as there's a dividend in sight; that's inevitable. And even if it stays pegged at seven or eight, there's a huge profit for us, isn't there?"

"But suppose there's never a dividend?"

"Don't we *know* there will be? Didn't I say we control the Board of Directors?"

"But suppose you can't find brokers to —"

Hilliard gesticulated broadly.

"Why, as a matter of fact, we don't care very much if we *don't!* That's the commoner method, and that's the way to get our money back almost at once, and then play on velvet. But if instead of working through brokers, we were willing to tie up our capital a little longer, we'd make considerably more money in the long run, as you can plainly see. We'd advance our hundred and twenty thousand dollars, wait until dividends could be declared, and then get the stock listed on the Curb and begin to feed it out to the public through a fiscal agency. There'd be twice as much in it for us, but we wouldn't be in that perfectly delightful position of owning a lot of valuable stock which literally hadn't cost us anything. Or, of course, we could offer some of the shares to our personal friends at a fair price, and reimburse ourselves that way. Knowing that it's worth ten or fifteen, we wouldn't feel very guilty about selling it to personal acquaintances at eight or nine, would we? Why not — when we know for a certainty that it ought to go up to fifteen? They'd bless us for it!"

"But the main point; the *staggering* thing about it, is —"

"Is that if the public gets ten or fifteen percent dividends," said Hilliard, "or buys at ten and sells a few dollars higher, it thinks it's lucky; and in the meantime, the underwriters make anything up to a thousand percent, and get it in a few months. And I've known some of these syndicates to turn over in a few days."

"Oh, I want to do it!" said Angela ecstatically. "I want to do it! Dad! Let's be a syndicate and go

out to Montana until it's over! Come on! Let's!" Hilliard laughed cheerfully at her.

"In this particular case," he said, "the syndicate's about half formed. Nothing final, but it's pending. And it *is* good — so good that I doubt if any layman could break into it with a cold chisel." Again, he excused himself on the ground of salesman's license. "But that's the fundamental idea, Mr. Cullen — that's how the thing is done, and that's how the public carries the whole burden of financing, and doesn't know it. Do you wonder I say that the spirit of the modern West is down in Wall Street?"

He assumed an attitude of easy unconcern. Angela, her breath coming rapidly, was regarding him with awe-struck eyes. Mr. Cullen, his mouth drawn to a perfectly straight line, was gazing spellbound at the orderly array of figures on the envelope.

"And this — is a genuine mine?" he managed presently.

"In my opinion, it's a very wonderful prospect," said Hilliard, and he believed every word of that solemn statement.

Mr. Cullen folded the envelope, and then suddenly, as though too cautious to betray his profound absorption (which he had been betraying frankly for at least twenty minutes), tossed it back to Hilliard.

"When you've got a syndicate that'll let me in for say, thirty cents," he said, with elaborate humour, "just pass along the good word, will you?"

"I never try to do business with my friends," said Hilliard, with the most delicate touch of reproof.

"A good principle, too, but —" Mr. Cullen glanced at his watch. "It's dinner time, and more too. We'd

better get along up to the house, or the first thing you know, we'll have servant troubles in our midst. And you didn't bring up that subject anyway — *I* brought it up." He took Angela's arm paternally. "Just as a matter of fact," he said, clearing his throat. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Hilliard — whereabouts did you say this property is located?"

Shortly after dinner Angela, who had fled to the telephone in answer to a peremptory summons, came back complacent.

"Dinner at the Durants' on Sunday," she announced. "All three of us. Very quiet, Carol said. So I accepted — and that means you've got to stay with us two days more anyway, Mr. Hilliard. Do you mind very much?"

"*Mind!*" Hilliard had risen half out of his chair. His tremendous yearning to see Carol again, and his violent reaction at the prospect, had greatly influenced his voice, which was strident, explosive. The Cullens were laughing aloud at his confusion.

"Why, Mr. Hilliard!" said Cullen, jocosely. "Is our own cooking as bad as all that?"

"He's blushing!" crowed Angela. "Look at him! *Look* at him!"

Indeed, he was crimson to the temples. Sunday — forty-eight hours! How he had spurned her! — and how he had suffered from that moment until now! To see her again . . . merely to see her! Business was business, and the farce must go on; no matter what else happened, he must hew out his success; he had ceased to love her, and he had come prepared for guerilla warfare . . . but to see her again! To hear her voice!

To watch that smile of hers, and remember the tears she had shed for Dicky Morgan!

Sunday — forty-eight hours!

The Cullens were still laughing at him, and in Angela's soprano there was a note of feminine resentment, but Hilliard's ears were suddenly stone deaf.

XI

"MUSIC," said the Doctor absently, "must be very unmoral."

From the piano, Carol laughed quietly, and went on playing, and playing beautifully, his hackneyed old favourite, the Rachmaninoff Prelude in C Minor.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because morality," said the Doctor, blowing smoke at the fireplace, "isn't much more than the crushing down of impulses that we wouldn't try to crush down at all if we weren't what we're pleased to call civilized. Therefore it's unmoral to attempt to arouse those impulses. But some kinds of music have the power of depriving some kinds of people of the freedom of the will. And so I say it must be unmoral, because it's seductive, and because it makes people stop being objective, and makes them *sub*jective, and at the mercy of the particular emotion that's stirred up."

A pause. The chords rose, and died to pianissimo.

"Does it make any difference to you," inquired Carol presently, "that I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about?"

The Doctor sighed comfortably.

"I'm only thinking," he said, "that as far as I'm concerned music has all the qualities of any other drug."

"Drug?" Her intonation was one of perplexity.

"Drug," said the Doctor. "Narcotic; stimulant. When a man's under the influence of alcohol, he's a disgrace; if he eats hasheesh, he's boycotted; but if he

takes music unto himself, and loses his volition under —"

"Don't be a silly!" she reproved him. "That's a very far-fetched comparison. . . . What shall I play now?"

"Anything you like . . . but I insist it's unmoral."

Carol swung towards him.

"Whatever's got into you tonight? Am I boring you?"

"Quite the contrary."

"Then what *is* it? What's all this nonsense about drugs and things?"

The Doctor smiled reassuringly.

"I'm perfectly serious, my dear. Music, in its emotional aspect, has had a great deal to do with the history of the world. It affects some types of men, especially rather ascetic men, as no other influence ever could. It does me. It always has. And I was thinking how unreasonable we are, when we've got such a power all ready to use, not to make more out of it. It isn't used in any of the modern cults, it never had a place in any of the mental cures that I remember, and yet it's a nerve tonic, and a vitalizer, and an opiate, and —"

"Doctor! You're saying it's unmoral, and then you —"

"Certainly. Just as I say that tobacco's a poison, but it's the pleasantest poison there is. Just as I say, more seriously, that morphine is an unmoral substance, but if it's used with discretion, it's invaluable."

"Well, what music is like tobacco? Answer me that!"

"Mendelssohn has about the same effect," said the

Doctor, placidly. "Mendelssohn's a clear Havana; and Grieg's similar, but Grieg has a Connecticut wrapper — pardon the discrimination."

"But —" She breathed impatiently. "The idea of comparing music with . . . well, with anything! And you're comparing it with *every*thing. The next thing, you'll say it's a beverage! It's ridiculous! Why not compare it with whiskey? Whiskey makes men do *awful* things. . . . You never heard of a man getting so intoxicated on music that he *killed* anybody, did you?"

"There was a time," said the Doctor, "when I think I could have killed the man who wrote Narcissus, and never had a qualm. And I should hate to have heard The Merry Widow Waltz another dozen times, and then met the composer in a dark alley. . . . What I really meant, of course, was that if you get a listener who's really sensitive, you can play on his emotions by music more effectively than by any other means I know of. I was thinking of the unmorality of it in that sense — of the possibilities. And you'll find examples in literature — as far back as the Bible — and in the history of every country in the world. The human voice and the violin, separately, are the two most potent influences for good or evil that I can imagine; and collectively, an orchestra has more possibilities than an apothecary's shop on the man who's responsive enough. . . . Please go ahead."

Over her shoulder, as she turned back to the instrument, Carol flung a playfully biting comment.

"I think you're proving your theory, all right," she said. "You've had about one too many, *I* think."

"No," said the Doctor, "and not nearly enough.

As it happens, you're soothing me very nicely. But when I was younger, I never could bear to hear certain people sing — especially contraltos. A contralto could have wrecked my home, if anybody could. And then if the right conductor and the right orchestra had played the Intermezzo from Cavalleria (before the hand organs got hold of it), I should have reformed. . . . What's that?"

"A descriptive tone-poem . . . guess what it's supposed to be?"

"Moonlight in a boiler factory?"

"Stupid! It's a revery."

"A what?"

"A revery . . . like it?"

"Nux vomica," said the Doctor, judicially. "Or . . . or aspirin. Swallow it quickly, and —"

"If you're not good, I'll stop! I will!" Nevertheless, she switched suddenly to another of his hackneyed favourites, the Marche Militaire. The Doctor held his cigar poised, until it went out. He sat motionless, reflective. He stirred scarcely an eyelash until Carol, an appreciable moment after she had finished, turned again.

"Well?" she said at length.

"Unmoral — unmoral," said the Doctor, under his breath. "And next to an orchestra, comes the piano. . . . You do play beautifully, Carol. You put such curious thoughts into my mind . . . as though you were speaking to me in counterpoint; saying what you never would say in words . . . and then, again, there's the composer talking to both of us. . . . Doesn't it make you think of the hymn —

Mourir pour la patrie
C'est le sort le plus beau
Le plus digue d'envie —

It does me. . . . And of so many other things — and people."

"Yes," she said. "It does that — of course."

The Doctor stretched himself, and tenderly relighted his cigar.

"I've seen a man," he said irrelevantly, "who's on the ragged edge of nervous exhaustion. He needs a lot of things — peace, and religion, and love, and encouragement, and sympathy . . . and some day, some fool of a physician is going to soak him in tonics and blood-builders, and make him worse. I've been wondering if you care to do some volunteer nursing."

"I?" she exclaimed. "Why, *I* can't —"

"Everything I've mentioned," he said, "you can give him with your ten fingers, I think. Because I'm pretty thoroughly convinced that he's as sensitive a young fool as I am an old one. So I'm wondering if you'd have any objection to letting him come around here rather often, and listening to you play."

"You're not serious!"

"Oh, but I am!" he said. "He's friendless, and he's so desperately impressionable that you could preach him sermons, and give him refreshment, and clear the cobwebs out of his brain, and put his mentality in order, and probably send him home to shed a few tears on his pillow — just as you can do to me sometimes. And none of us can possibly talk to him, and the drug-store hasn't anything that'll do him any good, and I want you to try. Just to please me; just for an experiment. Will you?"

"But . . . how funny!"

"No," said the Doctor, "merely the line of least resistance. I'm prescribing . . . well, about the same program you played tonight. Carol, it isn't humorous — music can make a man relax quicker than almost anything else I know, and to relax is what this man needs most. If he'd thoroughly break down for a quarter of a minute, the job's done. He'll break sooner or later, but the right sort of break is going to help him, and the wrong sort is going to harm him. So I want to try what you might call indirect psychic magnetism on him. After that, it might be time to take up some other method of treatment, but as I've told you so often, the practice of medicine is chiefly the practice of substituting something else *for* medicine. It's an experiment, but I want to make it."

"Well — who's the patient?"

"He isn't a patient of mine — not even a friend. That's why there's so much chance of success — he won't suspect that he's being treated. I merely want you to play on his emotions — to bring out all the sentiment there is in him. Melt him."

"Well — who *is* it?"

"It's Mr. Hilliard," said the Doctor, slowly.

"Oh!"

The Doctor smoked with close attention to the ash.

"Of course, I may be wrong . . . but Cullen told me today that yesterday he was very seriously upset. Organically, I believe he's sound. But he's been under a strain, and he can't seem to relieve himself of it, so that it'll have to be done for him. He's alone; terribly alone. He's as sensitive as I am — perhaps even more.

Cullen tells me that he reacts to the simplest kindnesses as though he'd had a bad-tempered stepmother. His ego is all clogged up with inhibitions that he can't get rid of. He's apparently going to stay here indefinitely, and — we have a very evident debt to him. I'm not his adviser, nor his physician, but I've made a diagnosis just the same, for humanity's sake, and at the worst, we can't harm him. . . . Shall we try it?"

Carol, whose eyes had been on the floor, nodded assent.

"Yes," she consented, quietly. "I'm willing; if you really think it's worth while. . . . Just what was it you wanted me to do?"

"Simply to have him come here," said the Doctor, "and sit and smoke . . . and you play . . . well, about the same sort of things you used to play to Dick and me . . . before the war. . . . You remember how you could always manage Dick that way, don't you?"

Her head had sunk very low, and her voice was all but inaudible.

"But I couldn't — save *him* from himself, could I?" she said, tremulously.

"Who knows?" said the Doctor. "Under the circumstances, maybe you did. Somebody did. Or — at least that's what I gather from what Mr. Hilliard says . . . and Dick was saved in the larger sense, wasn't he?"

"Y-yes, if —"

"Who else in town ever sang Stevenson's Requiem to him beside you?" asked the Doctor gently. "And why do you suppose it came to him — as Mr. Hilliard says it did — when he went into action? . . ."

He tossed away the cigar, and held out his arms to her.

"Here, dear," said the Doctor compassionately. "*Here* — always!"

XII

SINCE Friday night, Hilliard had lived only for Sunday; his whole existence had been tuned to Sunday, and when at last the morning dawned, his greatest fear was that he might not live until dinner-time. At church, where the Cullens had taken him as a matter of course, he heard nothing whatsoever of the sermon; his first real consciousness of his own being was when, as he rose at the end of the service, he discovered to his unutterable chagrin that the Durants had been sitting a scant six pews behind him. The belated knowledge suffocated him; he felt as though his ignorance had robbed him of a precious hour which could never be regained; and the thought of how little he could have done in that hour never occurred to him. This, too, is one of the signs. . . .

On reaching Carol's side, he was both awkward and incoherent; and he failed to derive encouragement from the realization which gradually stole over him, that the Durants had asked a number of other guests to dinner. Armstrong was waiting patiently in the aisle, and keeping closer to Carol than Hilliard liked, and there was also a bright-faced boy of nineteen or twenty who had promptly attached himself to Angela — his name was Waring, and he was the grandson of the patriarchal clergyman, with the head of Moses and the spirit of youth, who presently came down to join the little group, and complete it. So that altogether there were nine people who finally sat down to table; and Hilliard's

dream of quiet progress and harboured conversation was shattered in a twinkling. To be sure, he was next to Carol, but Armstrong was on her other side, and Armstrong was attentively discursive. Hilliard was forced to devote himself mainly to Mrs. Durant; and she said afterwards that he was one of the most absent-minded men she had ever talked at.

It was all very homelike, and all very friendly, but to Hilliard, sitting there between Carol and her mother, the occasion was peculiarly acute. He had long since discarded any residue of his active fears; he was confident in his disguise to the point of recklessness, for he had covered the windings of the trail by an infinite variety of methods; and yet without having any tangible facts to grasp, he was subtly warned to remain on sentry duty over his poise. As he glanced around the table, he could see no one whom, directly or indirectly, in person or by hearsay, he had failed to propitiate and disarm; and yet he was conscious that his nerves irked him. To reassure himself still further, he catalogued the party, one by one; Angela adored him, and Mr. Cullen (especially after Hilliard's mild but repeated refusals of yesterday and the day before to talk what Mr. Cullen called "brass tacks") was somewhat bewilderingly a friend; the venerable clergyman had noted Hilliard's presence at church, and thanked him for it; and had heard what pains he had taken to come to Syracuse as a bearer of tidings, however sombre, and thanked him for that. Dr. and Mrs. Durant were supremely cordial, and Carol, if not demonstrative, was at least appreciative. Only the two young bachelors, Armstrong and Waring, showed even the remotest signs of reserve, and Hilliard, knowing exactly why, and not

blaming them in the slightest, exerted himself to smile upon them as warmly as he could, and to convey the impression that he was interested in Angela and Carol only as individuals to whom he had been directed to report, and not as lovely young women on their own account. But even so, he knew that his restlessness wasn't due primarily to any lurking opposition on the part of Waring or of Armstrong, and although he occupied himself for the moment in an endeavour to mollify them, he never ceased his attempt to analyse his uneasy mood, and to take steps to replace it. He met, however, with unvarying failure.

He was gratified that the conversation, after one natural enough eddy, was whirled away from the vicissitudes of Dicky Morgan, for he had talked his fill on that particular subject. And when the eddy had straightened itself out, it became a rather sprightly sort of general conversation, all things considered; and to Hilliard, in spite of his minor intuitions, it was a distinct relief to sit for once as a mere listener and spectator. For a time, he amused himself by watching Angela and Waring playing their world-old game across the table; after that, he paid a little polite attention to Mrs. Durant, and to the clergyman; and then snatching an opportunity unlooked for, he gave his kindest smile to Carol, and for an instant, took the monopoly from Armstrong. And he had hardly looked down once into her October-brown eyes before the mystery of his restlessness was as clear as crystal, and Hilliard was thoroughly dumbfounded, and confused.

It had come upon him, a quarter of an hour ago, as they exchanged their first superficial sentences, that he was lonelier than he had ever imagined, but he hadn't

realized, until this immediate contingency, that this sensation had carried over until now. He was prevented, by the very limits of the project which had brought him here, from releasing any of his true emotions or from putting forward any of his sincere thoughts; he hadn't comprehended, until he had learned the truth just now by actual experience, that loneliness is nothing but an aggravated state of self-repression. He was prevented from being even moderately spontaneous; he couldn't permit his true personality to find an outlet. Never in all his life, not even when he had lain for months in hospital in France, had he been as lonely as today, and at this moment, when he was surrounded by people he knew intimately, and when he was enjoined from sharing in their community of mind. He suffered as though he had suddenly been stricken dumb.

Carol, looking up at him with what wasn't exactly a smile, but was at least a cousin to it — that well-remembered flash of sympathetic interest — Carol spoke to him under cover of the general conversation.

"A penny for your thoughts?" she proffered.

"They aren't worth it," said Hilliard. "I was thinking about myself." He continued to regard her steadily, and he was alarmed to discover that he was losing one of the abilities which had made him so sure of himself. A day or two ago he had been able to gaze at her with profound indifference; since their last meeting, however, he had thought so constantly of her that he was involuntarily softened, and made more plastic; but still, he had refused to yield entirely to his volitions; now, he was grudgingly compelled to admit that she was no less desirable than formerly. He continued

to hold that she had treated him shabbily, mercilessly; but notwithstanding that, as he gazed at her, and perceived the sweet naturalness which was developing out of last week's shock, he was secretly perturbed. In spite of himself, he began to see, as though by camera obscura, dim visions of the past; he was righteously annoyed that they should rise to torment him, and still the visions came.

"But after all that you've been through," she said, "I should think your thoughts about yourself would be extremely interesting!"

"I'm afraid they're rather gloomy, Miss Durant, whenever they touch on what I've been through. And when anything like this gathering here today builds up a comparison. . . . I'm sorry, but I can't always master it."

"You mean the difference between a family over here and a family over there?"

"Exactly," he said. "Down to the last detail — what we eat, and where we live, and what we talk about, and what we think about — everything."

"I've thought of that, too," she said soberly. "But I'll have to confess that it wasn't until you came — it wasn't until after that first night at Angela's — that the great difference came home to me. It's made me feel that it's almost wrong — almost unendurable — that we should be so warm and comfortable, and well-fed, when over on the continent . . . well, I wonder whether we won't have to pay for this, sometime."

Hilliard's lips came together.

"Yes, we will. We'll pay for it three or four times over. The world's on a big balance sheet, and the

United States is one of the overdue accounts. We've got an extension of time just now, but a reckoning's coming. And there's no use shutting our eyes to it, because it'll come."

"But don't you think some good is coming out of the war in the end?"

His answer was delayed, and, in the meantime, silence had run around the table, and he had an audience of eight instead of one.

"I wish I could answer that the way you evidently want me to, but I'm not sure. Let me explain. In the first place, the mental condition of every one who's been in this war, or even seen it from near by, is upside down. Nothing's normal, nothing's the way you're used to thinking it is. The whole structure of living's changed. All the values are different. Human life doesn't mean anything; and when you've lost that as a basis of value, you haven't very much left. If you knew how men are handled — well, it sort of breaks up your faith in humanity. For instance, here's a detachment of a hundred men somewhere near the front line trenches, and there's an artillery offensive going on. Those hundred men don't represent a hundred separate personalities; nobody thinks of them as personalities or treats them like personalities; they're a tactical unit to be shunted around like a hundred sand-bags or a hundred shells for general purposes. They don't exist as men; they exist as material. They're there to act as a bulwark for another unit, and that other unit is a bulwark for still another unit, and so on clear back to the people who eat Sunday dinners in peace, just as we're doing now. . . .

"All around them it looks and sounds as though the

whole universe has turned into a mediaeval conception of hell, and then suddenly — pouf! and a hundred men aren't there any more! And it isn't that so many personalities have been eliminated; it isn't that perhaps a thousand other people back home are going to be affected all the rest of their lives; it isn't that the sufferings of the whole lot of them is even going to be considered; it's just a matter of so much war-material gone. It's a loss, but it's a loss that's figured almost in terms of merchandise. Casualties are casualties, and they go down on a daily report, and the statisticians work over them just as though they were figures of crops, or steamship tonnage, and that's where the thing ends! You can think yourself crazy about it; and a lot of men do. Where does the individual belong? What does he count for? What's the standard, when a good sand-bag is worth any two men in the line? An American minister I met over there said that the most frightful thing about it isn't that we're fighting this sort of war, or that such things happen, but that we've got ourselves into such a state that we *have* to fight it! And it's because we *are* in such a state that I have my doubts about the future. If Germany could start this war . . . why, some day there might be another one. The world isn't as far advanced as we thought it was. And I can't see how any good can ever come out of anything so terribly futile. I can't see how we're ever going to get a normal perspective. Because all this fearfulness isn't going to prove anything, except to demonstrate which side has its stronger resources. It can't establish anything but the facts as to which side has the more food, or fuel, or credit. And when we can risk the whole world for that —"

"Pardon me, sir!" This was the venerable clergyman on the other side of Mrs. Durant. "Don't you acknowledge any moral benefits to come out of this war?"

"No, sir," said Hilliard bluntly, "I don't!"

"You're not a pacifist, are you?" demanded Armstrong, nervously chewing his moustache.

"Hardly!" Hilliard's vehemence was checked as soon as he perceived that the question wasn't intended to affront him. "But as long as the moral question has come up, I don't mind saying that one point that's always troubled me is this; every nation in this war is praying to the same God. Nobody'll admit, of course, that there's more than one to pray to. All the nations in it profess to be Christian. Now I'm not here to get into any theological discussion, but what I want to know is how we're going to reconcile some of our old creeds if Germany wins?"

"But Germany *won't win!*" Armstrong, who had said this, explosively pounded the table for emphasis.

"That," said Hilliard, "is what I hope just as much as you do, and probably more, because I've seen enough to realize what it would mean; but I want to tell you here and now that unless Germany *is* going to win, she's got to be opposed by all the rest of civilization. The United States has got to get into it, too. As the situation stands today the Allies are beaten to a standstill. You don't believe that — partly because you don't want to believe it and partly because you aren't convinced of what's evident to Italy and France and England, and has been for months. But it's the truth — and, to go back to the main issue, and supposing that Germany wins —"

"There's always the possibility," said the clergyman,

" of a nation — even Germany — awakening after victory to a comprehension of the wrong it had —"

" But you can't find any precedents in history, sir! The winner always gets more imperialistic and the loser always sulks and waits for revenge. That's why I'm afraid that this isn't the last war — nor the worst. And I can't believe that this war is anything but futile, or *can* be unless, when it's over, we all get together and change the whole social and political scheme of the world from the ground up. And so far, that hasn't even been discussed. All that's been done is to make after-the-war plans on the same old theories of government. You people over here don't know what's coming — maybe after the war, and maybe before it's finished. But I want to tell you as forcibly as I can that the only really fundamental changes in sight — so far — are going to make more trouble than ever. And bring on a war ten times as big as this is, because it won't be simply international, it'll be universal."

" What are those changes, Mr. Hilliard? " The clergyman was mildly tolerant.

" There's going to be a step backward instead of a step forward. We're going to have the old conflict between church and state, instead of between nations. That is, unless the United States joins the Allies."

The resultant silence was electrical. The Doctor broke it forcibly.

" Mr. Hilliard — if that were anything like a fact —"

" It *is* a fact, Dr. Durant. I've just told you that you're not getting the sort of information that would help you to understand what's really happening over there. Trivial gains and losses on the military side; rows in the ministries — that isn't a circumstance to the

things that aren't passed by the censor. In France, the church as a political organization threatens to be more of a menace to the future of the world than —"

"Mr. Hilliard!" The clergyman was apoplectic. "I can't, I simply *can't* allow you to imply —"

"It isn't an implication, sir, it's a direct statement. The church in France aims eventually to dominate the civil government, and take control again. It would have its members recognize the church *today* as superior to the state. Presumably, to prevent war." Hilliard was growing dynamic. "The Bishop of Nantes has preached sermons about it already. And I understand that Russia and Italy are wavering about it too — and if the church does get what it wants, there'll be a German victory now, and another big war later — *unless* we get together for the future, and America comes in to help. And that doesn't mean simply getting together for more militarism. It means a community of aims; it means that the church will realize its position and withdraw. It means that America will write the peace terms, and that they'll be final. I believe in fighting it out to the finish, but always with a definite aim; and that aim would be to prevent any one man, or any body of men, in any civilized country, from ever again having the power to start a war like this."

"I should imagine," said the clergyman dryly, "that the supremacy of the church might be a very good thing, then."

"Oh, but the church never prevented any war in history from starting, did it? Understand, I'm not doubting their motives over there; the church simply wants the war to stop. And if it stops now, it'll be a tremendous disaster for all of us. We need a new

basis to live on, and unfortunately the very nature of the church keeps it from being progressive. It has to be conservative; that's the strength of its foundation. That's why I want the United States to get into it — to bring new energy to bear. That'll save the whole situation. *Then* I can see where good will come out of it!"

Carol touched his sleeve.

"Can't you see any bright spots?"

"Why, the first thing," he said, "is to conquer Germany. After that, we've got to conquer ourselves, or nothing's gained. I'm not sure that we'll do the first, unless something happens to give the Allies more power, or unless America joins in. But please don't call me a pacifist, or a socialist either. I'm not. I'm a pro-war, anti-Prussian republican. Only I want to see the *purpose* in this fight; and a blind victory is as good as nothing. I want to see a common purpose that'll make victory seem only like a single step in advance. And that means that the church mustn't be allowed to stop the war until *we*'ve had time to join in."

The clergyman was profoundly distressed.

"You speak of the church as though it were a serious drawback to civilization, sir!"

"I speak of the church as an organization which couldn't prevent the war. Therefore, I object to having it bring about a peace which would leave us worse off than before. In this particular case, the 'cloth' is pretty much like a wet-blanket. What I hope is that we'll go ahead and complete this job, always with the idea of reorganizing afterwards on principles which will leave the church where it belongs, once and for all."

"You have a strong contempt for religion, Mr. Hilliard."

"Not for religion — but for church politics. And I have that; and I'm not ashamed of it. Religion *can't* have politics; and as soon as the church recognizes that it's got to let politics alone, and let events take their natural course, the sooner we can begin to build definitely for the future. And that brings me back to the starting point. All these nations at war are supposedly Christian. But the war itself isn't a Christian war, is it?"

"On the side of the Allies, it is," said Armstrong.

"But that isn't reasonable either, Mr. Armstrong! That's exactly what the Prussians say about themselves. I believe that they believe it too. Think of the German battle-slogans! Well, now, are you going to claim that God has been naturalized in any one country? Are you going to admit that He approves of what's happened to Poland? And Belgium? And Armenia and Syria? Or are you going to concede that He's a Lutheran?"

"It seems to me," said the clergyman, much agitated, "that we *must* believe that out of it there'll come a great good to all the nations — the regeneration of mankind by trial —"

"Could any soldier," interposed Dr. Durant, "go through the trials of these present campaigns, and come out of them spiritually unaffected?"

"Why, no."

"Affected in what way — better or worse? Spiritually, I mean."

"Why, better."

"In spite of his own part in it?"

"Surely."

"Well, then," said the Doctor, "isn't that answer enough? What *is* mankind, Mr. Hilliard? Isn't it the sum total of all the individuals? And I don't care who the man is, or what his nationality is, I can't believe that any one, after this thing is over, and the reaction has set in, won't be a better man than he used to be, no matter how he conducted himself personally during the war. The war itself — that's barbarous. You've got to consider it all by itself. But Christian people can — and do — fight over un-Christian things. Still, the individual who comes out of it — he's going to be finer, and stronger, and more valuable to himself and to his country. It's inevitable; socially, morally, politically — whether the plan is made in advance, or whether the change comes spontaneously. Total all the nations — and there's your ultimate good; and when that time comes, there won't be any struggle between church and state, because right-minded men will pay allegiance to both. And neither one of them will try to undermine the other, because they'll have learned that they're inseparable. This agitation you speak of isn't a menace; it's a promise. It shows the beginnings of exactly what you say you haven't seen — a determination to remould the world on better lines. It's a trifle untimely, and that's the worst we ought to say about it."

Hilliard felt the blood rising in his cheeks.

"Well," he said, "I certainly hope you're right."

"How else can it be?" Dr. Durant was deeply serious. "Look at the one example we have before us now — Dicky Morgan. His own viewpoint of life was transformed almost in an hour. His manliness, his courage, his devotion — all the best qualities in him came to the surface, and stayed there, as soon as he

knew the ideals he had to fight for. What would *he* have done — how would *he* have guided the rest of his life, having learned all that he *had* learned — if he had lived?"

The question was unexpected and there was a moment of painful silence; Mrs. Durant came to the rescue with a piously immaterial rejoinder; the conversation picked up again, and flowed away in less philosophical channels. Hilliard, however, remained mute; Carol whispered aside to him.

"I *told* you they were worth more than a penny," she said.

Struggle as he would, he couldn't retain his protective shield of rancour and resentment; he felt it slipping incontinently away from him, and as it slipped, his loneliness increased a hundredfold.

"I'll grant that they are now," he said, under his breath, "because I'm thinking about you." He saw Armstrong, who had unfortunately overheard him, look up sharply, and he hated Armstrong, who was at least sincere.

"About me, Mr. Hilliard?"

"No one else." To his own amazement, he said this headily; his heart had taken over the dominant control of his tongue.

"Can you tell me about it?" Every word she spoke, every gesture she made, every tiny mannerism of hers, all at once possessed its former power to thrill him. A magnetic current began to flow between Carol's eyes and his; he was conscious of resisting it, and resisting fruitlessly. His nerves tingled.

"That depends."

"I — I suppose I'm to ask what it depends on?"

"I'd be bitterly disappointed if you didn't. Miss Durant, how old do you imagine I am?"

She smiled a trifle constrainedly.

"That's always an embarrassing question. Besides, you haven't given me any clue how you'd like to have it answered."

"I want your honest opinion."

"Thirty?" she guessed. "Thirty-one?"

Hilliard drew a deep breath.

"That's very flattering, but it's also rather a damper, Miss Durant."

"Truly?"

"Because," he said, "if you'd guessed forty, I would have gone ahead quite brazenly, but — well, thirty and forty have to speak to twenty-two in entirely different languages."

"If it'll help you out at all," she said, frankly, "I'm twenty-four."

He caught Armstrong's eye, and rejoiced at Armstrong's patent wrath.

"Then I'll be brazen," he said.

It was at this juncture that Mrs. Durant rose; and Hilliard, with keen foresight, and with full knowledge of Armstrong's restlessness, cannily guided Carol after her mother into the living-room, made for a familiar piece of furniture, and pre-empted it; it would seat two people, and no more — there wasn't the slightest use in Armstrong's loitering disconsolately in the neighbourhood; it had a maximum capacity of two. Furthermore, it was removed by several feet from the nearest listening post.

He was so close to her that their sleeves touched; he looked into the beautiful eyes which were so clear, so

unsuspecting; and his will swayed perilously. Had he prepared so long and savagely for his requital, only to lose his impetus at almost the first glance of those brown eyes? He reflected that there was nothing to prevent him from being a good salesman, and from renewing his predilection for Carol at the same time. The idea of courting her again, in his false character, was highly dramatic . . .

"If you had thought me older," he said, "and, mind you, I haven't confirmed your guess, I could have put this very differently. And if you had thought me older, you'd probably take it differently. You see, there are so many things I want to say to you, and our time's so limited, and Mr. Armstrong over there is so unhappy. . . . But first, I want to tell you how very much it has meant to me to know you, even in this superficial way."

"There's no age in that, Mr. Hilliard!" She smiled at Angela and young Waring in the corner.

"No, but I haven't finished. You see, I came up here to Syracuse on a definite errand." He paused briefly. "And . . . I can't feel that it would be quite fitting of me to use this occasion for anything personal to myself. If I should do that, I should feel as though I had committed a breach of trust." He loathed himself, but above all, he must maintain his reputation.

"You're — conscientious," she said. "I should have known that."

"Would you, really?"

"Any one would know it."

"That's the greatest compliment you could give me." He was the victim of strange, unrelated impulses. "But — I do want to come here to see you again."

"I shall always be glad to have you," she said, and her voice was low, almost inaudible.

"Mr. Cullen has asked me to be his guest for a few more days. I'm hesitating." His throat was dry, arid; the lie was choking him, and yet he was compelled, for the sake of consistence, to utter it. "If I accept, it'll be because I count on seeing more of you. So it rests largely with you whether I stay in town or not."

She looked at him searchingly.

"What can I possibly have to do with it?" she asked, gently.

"I know you won't misunderstand me," he said, his heart shaking, "and I hope that you won't consider it as too presumptuous — but — the other day you spoke of Dicky Morgan as a very dear friend of yours. Miss Durant, I want to do everything in the world I can for you, and he was my dear friend as well as yours. I'm not disloyal to him, or to you, or to myself — but I should like more than I can ever tell you to feel that I had done my utmost to take his place. No one can do that literally — I am not so vain — but if I could give you the slightest pleasure, the slightest consolation, by staying here, I intend to stay — and somehow I feel, and I *have* felt from the time we met each other, Dicky would have wanted us to be friends." There was a tremble in his voice as he ended. "The reason I mentioned my age . . . why, I didn't want you to misunderstand, that's all. . . . I wanted you to know that I'm old enough to see things as a younger man *can't* see them; to act as a younger man *can't* act; to —"

"That's — that's wonderfully thoughtful of you," said Carol, softly. "And . . . and I think he *would* have wanted that . . . if he'd known. . . ." Her

eyes were suspiciously dim, and Hilliard's loneliness dissolved into a great spasm of longing which held him, and shook him, and left him weak with impotence.

"Then I'll stay," he said abruptly. "Provided — provided you won't be offended if I *do* have to want to know you for yourself — just a little selfishly. I'm afraid that isn't very clear — it's difficult to separate it — but you see —"

"Don't try to explain," she said, subdued. "I know how hard all this must be for you — and I think perhaps you need my friendship as much as I need yours."

Before he could reply, there was a flutter of indescribable gracefulness before them: Angela was courtesying in mock obeisance to the floor. Behind her, Waring was watching her possessively.

"If your majesties will wake up half a second," she said, "everybody's going to walk up around the Sedgwick Farm tract to get some fresh air. Coming?"

As they stood up together, drenched with regret for the confidences that might for ever remain unsaid, a maid appeared in the doorway.

"Please, ma'am," she said breathlessly, "it's the Western Union — for Mr. Hilliard."

"Right in my study," called the Doctor, hurrying. "Just across the hall. There you are!" And ushered him into the sanctum, and considerately closed the door.

Despite the urgent summons which the average person feels under such circumstances, Hilliard was astonishingly tardy in sitting down to the receiver. For one thing, he was still vibrating from his recent stress of passion; for another, he knew pretty certainly what the

message was going to be, and for a third, he was somewhat emotionally under the spell of the Doctor's room. It was a room he had always loved; it had strong character about it; its rows and rows of books were humanized by tobacco smoke. Hilliard had spent a hundred hours in it — pleasant hours, so that involuntarily yielding to its kindly atmosphere, and all that the atmosphere implied, he took time to survey all four walls before he took up the receiver. And after he had listened to the telegram, and ordered a copy mailed to him in care of Mr. Cullen, he took time to survey those walls again, more closely; and this was partly for their intrinsic significance, and partly because his feelings were so fresh and tender that he dreaded to return at once to the gathering which, as a whole, couldn't be expected to defer to them. His eyes fell upon the Doctor's desk, wandered and suddenly focussed hard and piercingly. He went over to the desk, and slowly put out his hand, and lifted up a small photograph in a metal frame.

"Well, I'll be darned!" said Hilliard, just above a whisper. The turning of the door-knob roused him; he wheeled with the photograph still in his hand.

"Hello!" said Dr. Durant, cheerfully. "Get your message all right? What's that you've found? Oh, yes — Dick's picture."

Hilliard swallowed hard, and found that his voice was queerly out of control.

"It's — it's the same one —"

"Yes — it's the same as the one you brought back. I've had it there ever since he gave it to me."

He took it gently from Hilliard's hand; replaced it on the desk. "How that boy would have made good if

he had lived!" said the Doctor, in an undertone. "Well — they're waiting for us. . . . But I do hope you can find time to come in and have a quiet hour with me some evening soon, Mr. Hilliard. I think we can understand each other very easily."

Hilliard, following him outside, encountered the two Cullens in the hall, and at sight of his florid host, he collected his wits, and resumed his part in the play.

"Oh!" he said. "I — I — that was from one — that was a telegram from the manager of the syndicate, Mr. Cullen; he said it's decided not to try to re-syndicate any stock, but to hold it ourselves for the long pull — everything's put off for three or four weeks anyway. I'm having a copy mailed to the house — there's some news in it I thought you might like to see."

"Good! That leaves you free, doesn't it? You'll stay on with us then? Don't say no. I insist on it!"

"No, I couldn't do that! It's awfully kind of you, but —"

"You talk to him, Angela!" laughed Mr. Cullen. "You make him stay. You've got more influence over him than I have, anyhow. And don't you dare to let him get away without a promise — understand?" He passed on, and left them together. Angela's arm was through Hilliard's, and her piquant little face was upturned in mimic ferocity.

"You walk along with me, sir!" said Angela, imperially. "And you'd better behave yourself — I'm fierce!"

At the same moment that he looked yearningly towards Carol, who up ahead by the doorway was already captive to the wily Armstrong, young Rufus Waring was glaring belligerently towards Hilliard.

"Now we've *got to* hurry," he said. "Come, dear!"

The masquerader smiled in defeat, then smiled with sudden realization of the woman-child clinging to him. His heart was so malleable, just then, that he could almost have loved the whole world — and so it was that he gave expression of his mood to Angela, who was the nearest to share it. He squeezed her arm out of sheer affection.

"Your gallant cavalier'll cover me with horrid welts and bruises for this!" he said warningly. "Don't make him jealous, now!" They were now bringing up the rear of the procession in the hallway.

"I'll make 'em well again," said Angela. "I *am* a good nurse, aren't I?"

He was convulsed by her air of conquest.

"By the old-fashioned method?" He could hardly believe that this was the girl he had taught to climb trees, and make slingshots.

"I'll —" She stopped and blushed. The others were all on the steps; these two were in the dusky vestibule. Waring was fretting impatiently outside.

"Would you?" asked Hilliard. He intended only to tease her; but all at once her head came up, and he could see that her eyes were big and soft and frightened. She was hardly seventeen, and to Hilliard she had never ceased to be the child of two years ago. He bent and kissed her; her lips were trembling, expressive.

"Now we've *got to* hurry," he said. "Come, dear!"

It was the tone he would naturally use to a child, but he had an uneasy feeling that he had used it to a woman. Children's lips aren't expressive.

And he had another intuition — still more upsetting to him — which was that he had been observed. For on the threshold of the outer door Carol and Armstrong

and Rufus Waring, as though turned back to inquire into the cause of Hilliard's and Angela's delay, were standing. . . .

He could not tell, of course, whether they had actually seen him. It was possible that in the dusk of the hallway he had escaped; certainly there was nothing in the manner of any one of the three, when Hilliard joined them, to convince him one way or the other. But he knew that he was in a critical situation; he knew that to any reasonable person who had seen him at that spontaneous little outburst of sentiment, his motives wouldn't appear to be very opaque.

No, the manner of those three who had stood on the threshold was astonishingly casual. Perhaps *too* casual. . . . Hilliard frowned, and tried to glimpse their various expressions. Ah! Waring, striding stiltedly ahead, had thunderclouds on his forehead, and as for Carol . . .

She turned to speak to Armstrong, and Hilliard knew.

For the remainder of the first stage of that walk, he spoke not a word to Angela, who trudged along by his side with God knows what tumults in her bosom. He thought not of Angela, nor concerned himself with the storm he had stirred within her. He was absorbed solely with the puzzle which lay before him, which was to detach Carol as soon as possible, and to explain himself. Otherwise, his reputation was ashes even now.

And, to his unbounded joy, the opportunity came soon — at the end of the road, where the party halted for a moment, to take a referendum as to the route. Armstrong strayed a yard or two too far, and on the instant Hilliard was at Carol's elbow. She said noth-

ing, nor did he; but when the march was resumed, he was beside her — and beating his brains for an introductory remark. He had to convince her he had been trifling with neither herself nor Angela, and he walked a good furlong before he could devise so much as an opening sentence. At length he cleared his throat.

"I've just decided," he said, "that I'm growing old, no matter what your estimate is."

"Yes?" She was immeasurably sweet and distant, and Hilliard's courage faltered.

"I have indeed."

They went half a block in silence. Ahead of them Armstrong, who was walking with Angela now, was turning his head at frequent intervals.

"How does one come to that decision, Mr. Hilliard?"

"In various ways," he said. "But primarily by the attitude of younger people."

"Oh!" Her tone wasn't reassuring.

"I've made a most touching discovery. . . . *Do* I look grandfatherly, Miss Durant?"

"No; I'd hardly say that."

He made a gesture of gratitude. "You've earned my permanent thanks. And you're consistent, too; I was afraid that when you guessed I'm only thirty you were being intentionally flattering. But I *am* growing old. How do I know? Didn't you ever read Leigh Hunt?"

"Just a little." There was a trace of warmth creeping into her voice. Hilliard held his breath:

> "Say I'm weary, say I'm sad;
> Say that health and wealth have missed me;
> Say I'm growing old, but add —
> Angela kissed me!"

He had spoken the lines magnificently, with the precise humour and pathos which go to make them immortal. "I'm glad she fits into the meter," he said thoughtfully, "because I can understand just how Leigh Hunt felt about Jennie."

"And — how do you think that was?"

"Very sensitive," said Hilliard, "and perhaps a little repressed and — decrepit." He smiled reminiscently. "I suppose there are very few things in life that make a man feel more mindful of his own crudity and general worthlessness than to have a child's spontaneous affection." It was the testing venture. She looked at him sidewise.

"More than if — if it *weren't* a child?"

"I think so." His tone was faultless. "It's the combination of beautiful innocence and beautiful ignorance — which aren't always synonyms, Miss Durant. A woman can make a man feel like Romeo, but it takes a very young girl to make him feel like Launcelot — at my age."

"She *is* adorable, isn't she?" His heart jumped at her cordial acceptance of his statement. "Only — she's seventeen, Mr. Hilliard."

"I know," he said gravely. "And that's why I'm so conscious of my own senility. Because all that beautiful innocence and ignorance is doomed, Miss Durant — who knows that I'm not the very last person to see it? Today, I'm only a much older man, some one she likes; tomorrow, I may be a man without the 'only,' and the more she liked me, the less she'd show it. But there's been mighty little of that sort of thing for me in the last few years from anybody, and I do appreciate it, and I'm not ashamed of it, either."

"No," she said, "you couldn't be. You're too human." She smiled at him, and he was transported at the proof of her sympathy. "If I were in your place, I'd want to feel the same way about it."

He thanked her in his heart. He had saved both Angela and himself, and held his pristine advantage.

But there was no disputing the fact that he had made an active enemy out of Waring, and an alert rival out of Armstrong. He smiled grimly as he looked at the man ahead.

"Mr. Armstrong seems to be very nervous," he said.

"Does he? I haven't noticed it."

"Not that I can blame him for wanting to be in my place. On the contrary, I'm sorry for him."

"That shows a very good disposition," she said demurely.

"Perhaps it does, and perhaps it doesn't. I believe every man owes it to himself to get what he wants. If he does, he's a success; if he doesn't — it's his own fault."

As he said this, they came abreast of the others, and Armstrong, who had heard the final sentence, whirled toward Hilliard.

"Regardless of methods?" he demanded.

"Why — to some extent," laughed Hilliard. "Why not?"

Armstrong delayed, so that the two men were a few paces behind the rest of the group. "I'm interested to know just how far you'd carry that theory."

"As far as Syracuse, at any rate."

"Is that your regular creed, Mr. Hilliard?"

"My creed isn't composed of words, Mr. Armstrong, but of actions."

They had spoken so quietly that no one perceiving them would have remotely suspected that a challenge had been offered and accepted.

"Actions do speak louder, of course."

"Mine," said Hilliard, "will give you no offence. But — I generally get what I want."

"So do I. Shall we shake hands on it?" Armstrong was very affable, but tremendously in earnest.

"With pleasure. I can count on your generosity, I see."

"And I on your courtesy."

"Thank you. He went complacently forward; but inwardly he was steeped in perturbation. The man was so deadly sure of himself. Could it be that he was tacitly engaged to Carol, in spite of what Angela had surmised, or so nearly on the road to an understanding with her that Hilliard was only making a fool of himself?

Armstrong laughed gently. It was like a dagger thrust in Hilliard's heart.

XIII

MR. RUFUS BRISSENDEN WARING (he was especially fond of the ham in that sandwich) occupied, during business hours in the summer months, the smallest cubicle of the largest suite in the White Memorial building. Mr. Rufus Brissenden Waring was fond of legal words and technical expressions; he would have told you quite naturally that he was an alumnus in Arts of Colgate University of the Class of 1914; and he would also have said that he had matriculated at Syracuse University, in the College of Law, last autumn, and that he was pursuing the prescribed course leading to the degree of L.L.B. His ambition, then, was to become an attorney and counsellor-at-law, master in chancery, and member of the New York bar. He was exactly twenty-one years old; a youthful prodigy, and not entirely unconscious of it. At present (to explain his connection with the White Memorial building) he was serving during the long vacation, as the youngest clerk in a very successful law firm, with nothing but the office-boy between himself and oblivion.

To judge from his attitude and from his ignorance that a man was laughing at him from the doorway, he was engaged in matters of the last importance. Before him on the scarred desk, a score of calf-bound volumes, ranged in toppling piles, awaited his attention. Here and there, other books were propped open, ready to hand; on the side of the desk, a thick pad of yellow scratch paper was placed conveniently. Young

Mr. Waring, his pencil gripped firmly, sat in rapt concentration on the brink of his swivel chair, studying cases. The month was August; Mr. Waring was deliquescent from the heat. Now and then, as his intellect swooped down upon some unprotected fact, he scrawled a note on the topmost of the yellow sheets; scrawled it without taking his eyes from the printed page; detached the sheet, and added it to the heap of similar notes beside his blotter. They were cabalistic memoranda, but they seemed to be highly inspirational, for young Mr. Waring's eyes gleamed wherever he caught one.

Pittsburg Mining Co. *vs.* Spooner 74 Wis. 307.

Veiser *vs.* U. S. Board & Paper Co. 107 Fed. Rep. 340.

Lomita *vs.* Robinson 154 Cal. 36.

The man in the doorway grinned more broadly.

"Busy, Rufe?"

Mr. Rufus Brissenden Waring fairly bounded from surprise.

"Oh!—Jack!" He exhaled mightily in relief. "You scared the daylight out of me! Come on in."

"Had to see your boss a minute," said Armstrong. "Just thought I'd stop and pass the time of day with you. But if you're busy —"

"Oh, come on in." He removed the books from a second chair. "I want to talk to you anyway." He went to the door and closed it. "I was going to telephone over to you tonight. But as long as you're here —"

"Something very hush?" asked Armstrong, amused.

"Ra-*ther!*" Young Mr. Waring sat down hard. "Look here, Jack, what's your private opinion about this man Hilliard?"

"It's a broad question, counsellor."

"Well, go ahead and answer it."

Armstrong regarded him quizzically.

"Any ulterior motive?"

"You said something! Please answer me, Jack. This is serious."

Armstrong stopped grinning.

"Excuse me, Rufe; I didn't know. Why, I think he's a mighty pleasant, affable sort of a person — and a wonderfully good mixer. Everybody in town seems to like him very much."

Waring leaned back; pressed the tips of his fingers together; frowned judicially.

"All right; proceed."

"Isn't that enough?"

"No; make it explicit. Go into details."

"Well — he's extremely generous and —"

"Sure?" snapped Waring.

"Well, he gave a thousand dollars to the Red Cross, and —"

"Honest? That's news to me."

"He did it just the same. And he's promised to contribute again if we can't make up the quota. And he's given a lot to the other war funds, too. He's got bales of money. He —"

"Sure he's got bales of it? Any proof?" No member of the Appellate Division could have been more critical of the evidence.

"He must have, Rufe. Since he went down to the Onondaga, it's costing him a tremendous pile to live, and he's given away such a lot besides, and he's bought a car — you ought to have seen the way he bought it! Carol and I were with him. He went into the Franklin place and took a roadster with about as much fuss as

I'd make buying a cigar. Just wrote out a check and it was all over. People who haven't money don't do business that way!"

"Humph! How much do you think he's got?"

Armstrong began to be really attentive.

"What's on your mind, Rufe?"

"I'll tell you later; answer the question."

Armstrong's native conservatism made him pause.

"Why, I'd judge he's living at the rate of twenty-five thousand a year at the minimum. And he's retired, too; so I should say he'd need half a million or so to keep up that gait."

"All right; how old do you think he is?"

"Why — thirty-seven or eight. What's all this about, anyway?"

"Humph! What do you think he's hanging around Syracuse for?"

Armstrong reddened.

"Why, he says he likes it. He hasn't any home — maybe he'll settle down here. I know he's looked at some real estate up by the Sedgwick Farm tract."

"So this is about the way you size him up — rich, retired, nothing to do, generous, affable, popular, charitable and hanging around Syracuse because he likes it. That about right?"

"Pretty nearly. Why?"

Waring inhaled powerfully.

"Remember that Sunday we had dinner at Carol's house?"

"Yes."

"Ever since that day," said Waring, also growing red, "I haven't *liked* that man. I — well, never mind, but I've got a darned good reason not to. And you

know how it is, Jack — when you've got good and sufficient grounds for not liking a man, you sort of take that as presumptive evidence that he's got other defects you don't know anything about. And — I don't *like* him. And I said something to Angela about it, and we had a — a misunderstanding. She's crazy about him. Perfectly crazy. And she was pretty much upset, or she probably wouldn't have let this out, to judge from what she said afterwards, but it seems that this man Hilliard has been talking to her father about some of his mining schemes — and Cullen's going to put up some money. And I don't like the looks of it."

"What!" Armstrong was no longer quizzical.

"Angela said so. She said it's an underwriting scheme. She said Hilliard's going to make her father a multi-millionaire or some rot like that. Now of course it may be all right, Jack, but I don't like it. If this man Hilliard has such bales of money, what's he picking up small change from Mr. Cullen for? And if his scheme's any good, why doesn't he take it to New York, where money's *raised* for big deals?"

"You're excited, Rufe!"

"Sure I am! Here's this man coming into town, and going to church, and batting around with all the different crowds, and shelling out contributions to charity, and acting like a bloated bondholder — and then collecting money from Mr. Cullen. Angela hinted it was thirty thousand. And —"

"But Rufe! You haven't any cause to imagine it isn't straight business. He's under obligations to Mr. Cullen; why *wouldn't* he let him in on a good thing, if he had one? And if Hilliard had any idea of getting anything from Cullen dishonourably, wouldn't he have

stayed on as their guest? Wouldn't he have used every last hold on Cullen he could get? I happen to know that he wouldn't think of it. You're all stewed up because Angela —"

"Well, I'll have to give him credit for that much," conceded Waring. "Going down to live at the Onondaga when he could have sponged on the Cullens — and I've only got my private opinion anyway, Jack, and nothing to back it up with. But you know when you once get a suspicion — and you and I are pretty much in the same boat —"

"How do you mean?" demanded Armstrong quickly.

"You aren't deaf and dumb and blind, are you?"

"No, Rufe — not by a mile."

"Well — Carol and Angela. He's after one or the other of 'em, and I don't know which. Neither does anybody else. That's why I thought I'd like to have this conference with you. We're in the same boat. So I've been getting up the law on promoters."

Armstrong, stirred more by the reference to Carol than by his young friend's suspicions, put out a calming hand.

"Rufus, you're much too excited. Let's start fresh from the beginning. Henry Hilliard had a good reason for coming up here, didn't he? And a mighty friendly reason, too."

"Yes, I'll have to concur in that."

"And you can't blame him for having the Cullens like him, can you?"

"No-o."

"And everybody's been pretty nice to him, haven't they?"

"Why, I'd say so."

"Any reason why he shouldn't stay here if he enjoys it?"

"Well —"

"So all you're rioting about is his letting Mr. Cullen in on a business deal?"

"If he —"

"And you'd never think twice about it if it weren't for some misunderstanding of yours with Angela."

"Well, even if I waive —"

"And so you're suspicious of all his best qualities!" Armstrong laughed kindly. "Why, Rufe, there's nothing to be disturbed about! The one thing you do have to keep in mind is this: it doesn't do the least good in the world to despise your — er — your enemies. You never know what they're thinking about *you*. The best way to handle it is to remember that the other fellow is probably just as much fussed up about it as you are, and maybe more. And *you* haven't anything to worry about, anyway."

"Why haven't I?" asked Waring, doggedly.

"Because I have."

The embryo attorney and counsellor-at-law (master in chancery and member of the New York bar) looked feelingly at his heap of miscellaneous notes.

"I'm not telling all I know, Jack — not even to you. But I think you're wrong. I — I've got some evidence . . . only I can't figure out what it means."

"Circumstantial?"

"No; direct. Evidence of my own eyesight. It's *conclusive*." Armstrong brightened, remembered that he was between two fires, and sobered instantly.

"But let's give Hilliard the benefits of all the doubts there are — You know, Rufe, one of the platitudes

that makes me maddest is that old one about everything being fair in love and war — it's so untruthful. Fairness is fairness, no matter where you find it. Look at *this* war, and see what's come of that platitude! Let's you and I be fair to ourselves, and him too. I've been playing square with him for a good many weeks, and I like him better all the time. He's a good sort — really. Let's give him the benefit of all the doubts. Bargain?"

Waring sighed dispiritedly.

"Oh, I suppose that's the way it would look to a reasonable man — I'm not reasonable about it, somehow."

Armstrong rose, and put out his hand.

"There's enough real trouble in the world without any one trying to dig up any more, Rufe," he said. "Cheer up! And — don't let this weigh on you. Just pull yourself together and forget it. Will you?"

"I'll do the best I can, Jack."

The law-student watched his older friend out of the door, and turned back to his disordered desk. He picked up the last sheet of his notes, relinquished it, selected an intermediate sheet and read slowly: "Veiser *vs.* U. S. Board and Paper Co. 107 Fed. Rep. 340. The promoter of a company stands in the relation of a trustee to it, and to those who became subscribers to its stock, as long as he retains the power of control over it." He replaced the memorandum in its proper order, and reflected profoundly.

"If it isn't a corporation, it's a partnership," said Waring, "and if it isn't a partnership, he's acting as an individual. Any way you look at it he's personally responsible. And —" He thought judicially of what

Armstrong had said to him. "Oh, well," said Waring, dropping into his chair. "I guess it won't do me any harm to know the law, anyway!"

He propped another book open and began to concentrate.

XIV

IT had been a difficult problem for Hilliard, a difficult and an exhausting problem, and although he had often solved it to his satisfaction, it possessed the irritating quality of refusing to stay solved. Once or twice each day he was compelled to attack it anew, to lock and grapple with it and master it; and after each bout, which came invariably to the same result, he dismissed the problem from his calculations, and deluded himself into arguing that it was never to return. And just as often as he considered that it was expelled for ever, it somehow gathered up its dissipated strength, and crawled indomitably back to lock with him again.

For thirty days he had listened to the eulogies of his secret self. He had heard from a hundred sources the same belief repeated, that Dicky Morgan, given time and counsel, would have made the city as proud of him for his intrinsic worth as it now was proud of him for his military valour. This praise of Dicky Morgan had at first stunned Hilliard; after that, it had exalted him; still later, it had abrased his soul. He had longed, ceaselessly, during that third period of his introspection, to take the city to his heart, to reveal himself, to answer for Dicky Morgan's failures and to pledge himself anew to the achievement which Dicky Morgan's friends had prophesied; and then he had been overwhelmed by the recollection that he had made this course impossible. He had established himself too strongly; there was no defending the glamour he had

spread so thickly over the name of Dicky Morgan; there was no explaining the myriad of deceits which went to make up the entity called Hilliard. If he had only known that all his deceptions were needless! If he had only known that Dicky Morgan could have come home, and been forgiven! What anguish he could have saved — and what repentance! And the problem was still the same — should he continue, safe in his masquerade, to the goal he had set for himself, or should he risk the worst, and salve his conscience by renunciation?

But as it was, he was curiously thrilled by the new repute which was slowly attaching to him. He had an unaccustomed sense of civic uprightness quite apart from his sense of shame for the methods which had brought it about; he knew that he was looked upon as a steady churchman; that he was supposed to be a lieutenant, if not actually a captain of important industry; that his democratic instincts were marked and applauded; that he passed current as a philanthropist and a plutocrat. This novel reputation was wonderfully sweet to him; he cringed to think what a storm of fury would gather against him if he should lose, voluntarily or involuntarily, the position he had gained, and, in assuming his proper character, take with it the censure for having hoodwinked a whole community by a scheme so indefensible, and so loaded with egotism. Syracuse was loud in its praise of Dicky Morgan; and Syracuse was deeply respectful to Henry Hilliard; but if Syracuse ever came to know that they were one and the same person, biographer and outcast, the career of both would wither and die in the burning atmosphere of disgrace.

He had never felt so sinful as he did now; and he had never been so proud in all his life. And it was pride which chiefly governed him, and he was proud, not of anything he had accomplished materially, but of what he had accomplished spiritually; he was proud of the personality with which he was credited, and which he had not originally possessed, but which was slowly moulding itself upon him. He still retained the inner sensibilities of Dicky Morgan; the identity of Hilliard was a thing apart, a deliberate creation, a piece of handiwork — real and alive, and yet subliminal, detached. He fiercely admired that shell of mystery which was Hilliard; he — with the perceptivity of Dicky Morgan — was devoted, and more than devoted, to the ideal he had dragged out of the abyss of failure. He fairly worshipped Hilliard; worshipped him for the fictitious qualities which made him respected by others. Regarding Hilliard in the mirror, he was himself held spellbound by those features which fascinated men and women alike; he was almost fanatical in his gratitude to the surgeons who had fashioned them.

And he was fiercely proud of Hilliard's very modesty, and repression, and kindness — he gloried in these attributes which, at first, were merely assumed as part of his disguise. He gave away Hilliard's money to charity, not with any qualm for the premeditated stratagem, but with quickening pleasure in Hilliard's ready generosity. Sometimes, at odd moments, he was struck by the realization of his own uplifting — that he could still admire the virtue of his apparent self, and still comprehend that it was the virtue and not the deception that he admired.

And then, little by little, he had seemed to feel the

soul of Dicky Morgan merging with the body of Henry Hilliard, so that what he did, and what he said, was no longer deception, but the true expression of his character; he was aware that now and then he thought of the two persons as one — and the one was Hilliard. At this point, his pride was higher and his guilt was less — and then the problem darted out from ambush, to be wrestled with and mastered all over again. For it was indisputable that if he chose to be actively sincere, he should have to betray himself, and that if he didn't, he could never expect to sleep peacefully of nights — and his varying motives were most woefully intertwined.

By far the most distressing factor in this puzzle was his relationship to Carol Durant. He had seen her only half a dozen times during the month, and never alone — the fates and Armstrong had circumvented him — but he was head over heels in love with her again, and he sensed, from fugitive glances and a stray word or two on her part, that she wasn't entirely averse to him. Not that she was yet committed to solid friendship, but she was holding him in suspense. In time, there might be a ray of hope . . . and he should enjoy the delirious ecstasy of courting her again, with no past derelictions to account for. That is — provided the problem would somehow stay solved. But what would Carol think if she knew that this grave and tender stranger was hiding behind the wraith of Dicky Morgan? And yet, after thirty days of falsity on falsity, how could he admit his identity? If she had truly been in love with Dicky Morgan — it was a thousand times the worse! If she were ever truly in love with Henry Hilliard, it was impossible!

And then there was little Angela Cullen —

And in addition, there was the serious business of making good; he was no longer impelled to it by resentment, but rather by unadulterated ambition; this, too, he would see destroyed by any admission of his deceit. To continue in the game was to lose his probity; to relinquish it was to lose all else; and even now, his joy and pride was contained in precisely those things which he must give up, if he decided to tear off the mask of hypocrisy; and his self-respect was rising out of the mud of what he never should have done at all.

When he thought of his worldly ambitions, he was profoundly regretful that he had talked professionally with Mr. Cullen. To be sure, the matter had come up casually and naturally, and the opening had seemed too good to be missed; at the same time, Hilliard couldn't help reflecting that it had been premature. Diplomacy required that he display no element of haste, no trace of eagerness to launch his stock campaign; he was now compelled, by what had gone before, to put Mr. Cullen off, to whet his appetite, to play him carefully, and wait for the precise moment when one timely victory would pave the way for others. It might prove, eventually, to have been exactly the proper course to produce results; it might be that Cullen would become so impatient that he couldn't be restrained, and would leap without looking, and leap further than he intended, and yet, ever since that preliminary interview, Hilliard had known that he had made a breach in his own fortresses; that he had rendered it possible for an informal (and logical enough) investigation to begin, or for mild suspicion to arise and gain momentum before he had devised the means of combating it. He knew that in all prudence he should have delayed for at least another month any

reference to his business affiliations; and then the story should have gone out shyly, and by degrees; and become assimilated with equal slowness; it should first have been nourished by strangers, and afterwards adopted and supported by its foster parents; a rumour with no definite origin. And although Hilliard believed implicitly in the goods he had to sell, he knew the difficulty of the market; he knew how timorous is the average investor; and he knew that there might very easily come a time at which his long harangue would be remembered, and remembered adversely.

In this connection, he was irritated by the tone of Harmon's letters to him from New York. Harmon was enthusiastic, and confident; he was relying sturdily on Hilliard to break through the acumen of the up-state capitalists; but he thought that Hilliard was making haste too slowly; he opined that all Hilliard needed to do was to devote himself to a hard onslaught against Mr. Cullen, and, after that, to gather subscribers where he chose. He said that Hilliard was wasting time, and ought to begin to collect signatures. Harmon mixed his metaphors badly, but his meaning was very plain. "They'll follow Cullen like a flock of sheep," he wrote, "so you get busy on the decoy duck. And don't pass up the little pitcher, either." Hilliard had mentioned, in a moment of indiscretion, the assistance which Angela had unconsciously given him, and Harmon had appraised it highly; but it angered him, when he saw this reference written down in Harmon's letter, to have her name brought into the instructions, even by implication. Still . . . had he not invited this upon himself?

It was in a dizzying quandary, then, that Hilliard kept his next appointment at the Durants'. The prob-

lem had grown so many branches, sent forth so many tentacles of bewildering confusion, that he hardly knew what to say, where to turn. There was apparently nothing for him to do but to follow his selected procedure, and yet the incessant growth of barriers in the path was tripping him at almost every stride. His one consolation was that the miracle which had been performed upon him had given him a mask of impenetrable calm. At least, he didn't have to wear his forebodings on his countenance.

And yet, almost the first words Carol said to him were: "Something's troubling you, Mr. Hilliard."

He was momentarily demoralized, and came near showing it — tried to pass it off with a laugh.

"Did I make it as plain as all that?"

"No," she said, "it wasn't plain at all."

His laugh was remarkably hollow, but he persisted in it.

"Why, how did you think of it, then?"

"Just from your eyes," she told him. "What's the matter? Anything I could help straighten out for you? Or couldn't I *listen?* That helps a lot, sometimes —"

Hilliard made a heroic effort to fling off his mood.

"It's nothing but every-day worries," he said. "I'm sorry I made it so apparent."

She looked up quickly; his symptoms were unmistakable. And the lines of pain around his mouth and on his forehead gave him an expression which took her breath away,— it was so poignant in its evidence of suffering. She dropped her eyes, and the colour deepened in her cheeks.

"Isn't there anything I can do?" she said. "Or . . . or that Father could? You frighten me. . . ."

"I'm sorry. . . . No, please don't think of it. I ought to be shot if I've made you unhappy."

The bitterness in his voice was acute; and, by paradox, it was caused mainly by her sweet concern for him, and his realization of how little he deserved it.

"You always seem to be pushing the world away from you," she said, after a pause. "Why do you, Mr. Hilliard?"

"I didn't know that I do," he said dispiritedly. "And it would be a queer thing for me to do deliberately, when I want your friendship more than anything else I can possibly imagine — wouldn't it?"

She hesitated.

"I've wanted to know you better, too," she said finally. "But . . . had you ever noticed that we're always talking in the present tense. Often I feel as though I don't know anything about you at all. And people never can be more than chance acquaintances until they've shared some of the life they had before they met each other."

Hilliard shuddered.

"It may be because there are so many things in my life I prefer to forget."

"Not your *whole* life, surely?"

"Almost my whole life," he said, without wisdom. "It hasn't been so happy that I want to brag about it. . . . And, besides that, what would I really gain if I should draw the curtain?"

"But a woman," said Carol slowly, "almost always has to be a confidante before she becomes a friend. . . ."

They sat without stirring while the clock ticked off a dozen seconds. Hilliard, scarcely knowing what he did — and, if he knew, indifferent — had put both hands

to his forehead, as though to calm the vicious throbbing within.

Presently, and so quietly that he never heard her, Carol was gone — she had slipped across the room, to the piano. . . .

A breath of music, light, dreamy, caressing. . . .

And there, on the sofa where Dicky Morgan had sat, and smoked, and taken his happiness with the utmost nonchalance, sat Hilliard, in tensest desperation of soul, strained to the tenuous melody which floated across to him,— an echo of youth and gladness which mocked him, derided him, indicted him . . . a translation of the unutterable sadness which welled up in his throat and choked him. . . . She was playing the "Liebestraum."

His shoulders went up convulsively, and he was chilled to the heart. Liebestraum! It was a taunt, a savage cynicism, a challenge to his inward self. The waves of it battered his unresisting conscience; the piercing tenderness of it damned him, while it awoke his dormant passion, and set his will to vibrating. Liebestraum — and the dream of *his* love was a phantasm which his brain reeled to contemplate! The lump in his throat came near to strangling him.

The music was painting fairy pictures for him now . . . he could see, as though at an immense distance, vignettes of platinum-shadowed water in the moonlight, graceful branches wavering against the sky, the dark masses of rock and bush at the lake shore, and Carol . . . always Carol. . . .

Contrast — and the black and red of a world tortured by bursts of hideous flame and smoke. . . . Contrast, and the dead stillness before the storm . . . and

again vignettes, and the sound of tiny waves breaking upon the pebbles, and the scent of the summer night in his nostrils. . . .

His eyes were closed, and he was breathing heavily. Liebestraum — after all these years! She was playing for him again; playing as he had forgotten she had played! It was the renewal of the least shameful hours he had ever known. It was a scene from the life he had spurned, and spat upon. It was a flight to yesterday, to the innocence and affection which had withered in the heat of his intended vengeance. She had always been able to enthral him, when she liked; and she had known that Liszt was as strong wine to his soul. The picture — the picture! Himself — and Carol . . . when the world was all at peace, and he need have no loathing for himself because he loved her. The familiar notes could almost hurt him physically, his senses were so keenly alert to the lovely melody. . . . And all at once, while Hilliard's heart stopped beating, the terminal phrases, questioning, appealing, agonizing. . . .

It seemed to Hilliard that hours must have elapsed before he had the strength to rise, and cross the room. His brain was buffeted by wildly giddy passions; he was only partly aware that Carol, trying to rise from the bench, was wide-eyed with intuitive apprehension. Volition had gone from him; he was acting without reserve, without premeditation.

"Tell me!" he said thickly. "Have I got a chance? One in a hundred? One in a thousand? But a *chance?*"

"Oh! . . . Mr. Hilliard!" Her plea was to his chivalry, and had to be.

"Tell me . . . *would* I have . . . if I should share everything you —"

One hand was pressed close to her breast; the other was outstretched, defensive.

"Don't! *Don't!* Don't spoil what was —"

"You'll have to answer me. . . . I can't wait any longer. I'm not worth your little finger and I know it . . . but I want a chance . . . just a fighting chance . . . you've *got* to answer me, Carol . . ."

She was trembling within reach of him, but it never occurred to him to touch her, and if it had, he would have refrained, out of sheer consciousness of his lack of right. It wasn't the present moment that absorbed him; it was the potentiality of the future — the course by which he could earn the privilege that he asked. His face, working tragically, awed her.

"Yes," she said, hardly above a whisper. "There's . . . one chance in a thousand. There's . . . that much, anyway."

His arms went out to her — stayed — dropped. He stepped backwards, out of the danger zone.

"Then I'll take it," he said.

She had given him a chance, on an implied condition which he could never meet. She had given him a chance — and what in the name of Heaven could he do with it?

XV

FROM the marbled dignity of the Trust and Deposit Company, where he had bought a New York draft for fifteen thousand dollars, and smaller ones for ten and seven, Hilliard emerged presently to South Warren Street, and stood there on the sidewalk for a moment, numbed by the first galvanizing consciousness of success. The September morning was clear and fresh and brilliant; he took it inclusively to himself, and thrilled not less to the world around him than to the joyous tumult within his own brain. He felt a sudden fraternity towards every passer-by; he was infatuated by every aspect of the city which had once rebuffed, then welcomed him.

He had come back to it resolved to win, in his second trial, the position he had failed to approximate in his first; he had set himself a commercial standard, and, gauged by it, he was advancing rapidly, for today's trio of subscriptions, added to Mr. Cullen's check of yesterday (and Mr. Cullen had acted as though he had gained a personal victory in persuading Hilliard to accept it), made up a glittering total, a stupendous total; and already Hilliard's earned commissions formed a sum to gloat about. As he stood there on the sidewalk, he felt that inrushing sense of dominant power and broad authority which only the acquisition of money, by individual effort, can give; but he had too, a finer, and a more uplifting thrill of triumph than money-success can ever give — the triumph over early fail-

ures. Despised as a salesman, he had sold to four impartial business men the commodity hardest in all the world to sell. Scorned for his behaviour, he had made his sales on the basis of a character which hadn't been questioned since the day of his arrival. His mind and his muscles clamoured alike for action; to relieve the pressure of his spirits, he set off vigorously, swinging, exultant. The best of it, as he assured himself over and over again, was that he had sold his project strictly on its merits as an investment; the cards had all been on the table; he had nothing in this transaction to regret.

On impulse, he crossed the street for the purpose of patronizing a florist's, where, ignoring the conventional measure of the even dozen, he ordered a prodigal armful of American Beauties for Carol Durant. This done, and feeling very rich and independent, he rounded the righthand corner, and got himself greeted by two citizens of standing and importance who, in hailing him, displayed a deference not ordinarily granted to the average resident of Hilliard's age. Would Hilliard condescend to speak at the next meeting and dinner of the Chamber of Commerce on France in wartime? Hilliard would. And this indication of his new-won status fired him afresh; he was exhilarated beyond his most feverish dreams of conquest; he was certain now that the time was coming when, with magnificent achievement and an impeccable new career to rely upon, he could fling aside the cloak of his disguise, and mount the pedestal of distinction which was so surely building for him. He could explain his acts when he could also extenuate them; was it not possible that the joining of the ways was near?

And then a dowager from the Solvay side of town beckoned to him from her limousine, and held him for a brief discussion of the financial needs of the Memorial Church; and after that, a matron from the most approved location on James Street waylaid him openly, and demanded him for dinner on the coming Friday. There was a Senator, she said, she wanted him to meet. Every step he took was another stride towards glory; he had never remotely fancied such pride and satisfaction as this; he radiated a warmth of spirit which was irresistible. There was none of Morgan's weakness in him now, none of Morgan's wild irresponsibility; he was *Hilliard* — with only one thing to be ashamed of, and that was simply that he hadn't been born Hilliard, instead of becoming Hilliard by re-birth.

And, logically enough, his swirling thoughts followed a well-worn trail which led him straight to Carol; and for the thousandth time he tried to set a future date, depending on the outcome of his mission here, at which he could confess, and ask forgiveness for his mummery, and simultaneously ask credit for his regeneration. He was at least on even terms with Armstrong; perhaps a pace ahead; and when Carol once knew. . . . The drama of it intoxicated him.

At this juncture, he was aware that some one had arrested him. It was Angela's youthful suitor, who had been peering enviously at the gorgeous haberdashery in Goettel's exclusive window, and turned away just in time to catch Hilliard by the sleeve.

"Oh — hello, Waring!" said Hilliard cheerfully. "How's crime?"

The student of law flushed at the lively salutation, which appealed to him as a reflection upon the majesty

of the bar. Also, his sense of humour was temporarily atrophied.

"We don't handle criminal cases," he responded shortly. "Say, when can you and I have a conference together, Mr. Hilliard?"

"Why, the sooner the quicker," laughed Hilliard. "What's it about?"

Waring coughed unnecessarily. "Business."

"The time to talk about business is all the time — isn't it?"

Waring hesitated, and finally stepped into the shelter of Goettel's doorway, drawing Hilliard with him.

"I don't suppose it'll seem like a very important thing to you," he said, rather awkwardly, "but it's important enough to me, Mr. Hilliard, to be worth taking time over — to be perfectly frank with you, I've got five hundred dollars I want to put in some high-class, gilt-edged speculation. And I've asked several people's advice — not to shift the responsibility, but just for instance — and — to make a long story short, Mr. Cullen gave me some pointers, and now I'm interested in your copper mine. Only — and this is where the hitch comes in — I've sort of got into the swing of the law, you know, and that makes men — well, what you might call judgmatical. You get so you want to look at everything from all four sides. And I thought maybe because of the — the attending circumstances — you'd be kind enough to explain the whole thing to me. Would you?"

Hilliard, who didn't know whether to be touched or amused, compromised by nodding gravely.

"There's one thing I'll have to tell you, though," he said; "I don't advise any one to gamble in copper

mines, or anything else, Waring, unless that person could actually afford to lose his whole investment, and not be hurt. And in this particular case, since I happen to control the situation, I won't permit it. Does that hit you, or doesn't it?"

The young man's mouth opened in amazement. He had been priming himself to be a clever investigator, and to pick yawning flaws in Hilliard's underwriting, and here his thunder was stolen before he had had a chance to stake the ægis of his cleverness.

"Why — it isn't a *gamble,* is it? I understood — Mr. Cullen said —"

"It's safer to figure it as a gamble, Waring. It's safe to figure all these things that way. Of course, we think it's a wonderful prospect, and a practically positive success, but I don't mind telling you that so far I haven't allowed a man who couldn't afford to lose his whole subscription — and didn't understand very clearly that he might — to come in for so much as a plugged nickel. And that would apply to you, too."

The law student gasped, incredulous.

"You don't mean to say it *isn't* a sure thing?"

"Is any speculation? You see I'm not working very hard to take your five hundred away from you, Waring. I don't mind your coming in if you want to, and I'd make it as easy for you as I can, but I don't want you to be under any misapprehension, not for one second."

The boy scowled.

"That's different — I suppose it's really too small for you to bother with. Is that what you're driving at?"

Hilliard smiled cordially.

"It is, and it isn't. From any one I didn't know, I'd rather not touch it. It isn't a good plan, ordinarily, to have a lot of small stockholders — the objection is simply that it complicates action, and action is what we want. But from you,— and if it isn't more than you ought to risk —"

Waring snatched at the straw.

"Well, seeing you're who you are, and I'm who I am, would you be willing to give me just as much information as you would if I had twenty times as much to put in?"

"Come up to the room," said Hilliard impulsively; and he was actuated solely by the obligation he felt towards all of Mr. Cullen's friends. "You come along up to the room, and I'll show you everything I've got. Maps — plans — figures — estimates — everything. Will that do?"

At the last words, the amateur detective had brightened.

"I can't come now very well. But maybe I could run up this evening, if that's all right for you."

"That'll be just as good. Eight o'clock? Fine." He held out his hand. Waring took it limply.

"I'm afraid I'm causing you a lot of bother," he said, "but it *is* a pretty big thing for me; I'd like to know just as much about it as you want to give me. . . . I hope you don't think it's anything personal . . . I mean my not just taking it for granted —"

"Not at all. Business is business. I'll expect you at eight, then." Hilliard nodded good-humouredly, and went on north. A quaint intuition overcame him, and he glanced back over his shoulder. Fifty yards

away the law-student was also glancing over *his* shoulder, and Waring, having less of self-possession than the adventurer, blushed and jerked his head to the front; Hilliard chuckled and continued his stroll.

Having completed the four sides of the square in a solitary little procession of triumph, he entered the Hotel Onondaga from the east, and headed across towards the news-stand. Out of a red and gold chair in the spacious lobby, a gentleman rose to meet him — a gentleman who in appearance was a very fair replica of the well-known Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford, except that he was somewhat more refined and less obese. He was beaming humorously and complacently; and his manner showed the paternal regard of an elderly employer for a bright salesman, who is breaking records. His animation was obvious, but he delayed to remove both his grey suède gloves before he offered to shake hands with Hilliard.

"Well!" said Martin Harmon, effusively, "you're looking great! Must agree with you up here, what? Didn't expect me, did you?"

"No!" Hilliard's expression was a study; he had dealt so long with Harmon at a distance that he had almost forgotten what the broker looked like. "Why didn't you wire me you were coming?"

Harmon waved a fat hand in deprecation; it was a gesture to imply magnificent events in the background. Hilliard noticed (and wondered how he had happened to overlook this before) that the broker wore a diamond ring of better than sixty candle-power.

"Didn't know it myself until pretty near train-time — spur of the moment. Well, got any business yet?"

Involuntarily, Hilliard smiled, and the smile spread

wonderfully, until Harmon caught the contagion of it and beamed more royally than ever. "The man you called the 'decoy duck'— remember when you wrote that to me? — well, he quacked yesterday."

Harmon put his hand on Hilliard's shoulder; it was an accolade. His round face lengthened into comparative seriousness.

"*Really?* How much?"

"Thirty." For the life of him Hilliard couldn't resist a slight forward thrust of his chest.

Mr. Harmon's eyes glazed for an instant.

"Good — good! That's clever work, son! Clever and quick. But I knew you'd do it. Thirty? That's fine! Anybody else?"

Hilliard laughed exultantly, and lowered his voice.

"Yes, three more — a total of sixty-two. I mailed you a draft yesterday morning; the others are in my pocket now. I've just come from the bank."

"Great work, son!" Mr. Harmon breathed rapturously. "That puts us pretty nearly where we belong. Sixty-two thousand! It's a running start for the big race! You certainly didn't get left at the post, Hilliard! Deducted your commissions yet?"

"No; I thought you'd rather do the bookkeeping in your own office and send me a check. I've still got twelve hundred left out of my expense money."

Harmon's approval was manifest.

"You show me the drafts, and I'll write you a check this minute. Let's go sit down in the grill, and *have* something. This is fine work, now I want to tell you!"

"I rather thought so myself." Hilliard had led the way to the grill, and commandeered a side-table. "In fact —" He lowered his voice. "In fact, as things

have worked out, Mr. Harmon, I almost wish I hadn't tried to play it just this way. I mean —"

But Harmon had already grasped the point.

"Oho! Is that so? You must have made a hit. And all your old friends you were so het up about — weren't they as peevish at you as you thought?"

"No." Hilliard grew warm. "I'd give a good deal," he said soberly, "if I hadn't tangled myself up in all that imitation history. I never liked the idea of it from the first. But after I'd once got involved in it —"

"Now don't criticize your boss," said Harmon, good-naturedly. "That was my own idea from start to finish."

"Only it wasn't. That is, it was your thought for me to go straight to Cullen, of course, but the *story* I told him . . . you don't know how far I went, and I'm not going to tell you. But all I'd intended to do was to furnish an alibi, and instead of that, I got into a sort of wholesale business." He smiled ruefully. "Well, I'm in for it now. I've published so much that I didn't need to — I'm wondering how in thunder I can ever get out of it when the time comes. That was the idea, you remember — coals of fire. What's bothering *me* is that there's nobody to tend the furnace."

"But I thought you were so anxious to keep in the shade?"

"Yes, but I didn't need to crawl in a hole, and pull it in after me! Well, we'll wait and see. That's my funeral; not yours. After I've gone a little further — and of course, you know I've hardly scratched the surface yet —"

"I know you haven't." The big man tucked his

gloves into his breast pocket, and brought out a silver cigarette case. "Have one?"

"Thank you. And you might take these drafts now; three of 'em. Right? Good. Well — any developments?"

"What?" Harmon tapped his cigarette case in the palm of his left hand. "Oh, you mean the mine. Why, I brought up another engineer's report for you; little bit better than the last one; shows a fine area of mineralized schist, with disseminated iron and copper values —"

Hilliard nodded. "Yes, but what I meant was, have you gone any further with the shaft yet? Two or three of the more cautious men are holding back until something happens with that. I'm hoping you can give me the ammunition to bring 'em down with."

"Shaft?" Harmon was puzzled. "What shaft?" He placidly stowed away the drafts. "I'm not sinking any new shafts at *this* stage of the game."

It was Hilliard's turn to be puzzled.

"Why, I mean the old shaft on Silverbow No. 1. Have you gone any further with it? I've told these people we were just starting. That's right, isn't it?"

Harmon laughed noisily.

"Oh, *that* shaft! Don't you think it's a little early to begin on that? Say, about ninety thousand dollars too early?"

As Hilliard sat gazing at him in profound bewilderment, a waiter slid up alongside him and coughed for his attention.

"What's the matter?" demanded Harmon, roughly. The waiter ignored him.

"Gentleman wants to speak to you outside, Mr. Hilliard. In the lobby. Says it's important."

"Oh!" Hilliard drew the back of his hand across his forehead. "Tell him I'll come right out. Will you excuse me a moment, Mr. Harmon?"

"Sure! Go ahead." The promoter sat back comfortably, and gave him a wave of dismissal. Hilliard, his pupils narrowing, went out to the doorway. A pace or two distant, one of the vice-presidents of the Trust and Deposit Company — a friend of Cullen's, and a very good man to know — was loitering restively. At sight of Hilliard, his face cleared, and he stepped forward quickly.

"Hello, Hilliard," he said, wrinkling his forehead. "How are you? Look here, it's none of my business, of course, but I couldn't help wondering how much you know about that chap you're sitting with. Don't be offended; it's a friendly question. Simply my interest in you as one of our clients."

"Why, I know a good deal about him." Hilliard wasn't exactly affronted, but he was annoyed, and showed it.

The banker continued solemnly.

"You probably know a lot more about him than I do, then, but just the same, I wanted to make sure. That's all." He turned, but Hilliard stopped him.

"Well, what do *you* know about him?"

"Before I answer that — is he a friend of yours?" The question was too blunt to be diplomatic, and too suggestive to be disregarded.

"Not exactly that; he's a rather good acquaintance, though. In a business way only — what he is socially I don't know, and I don't think I much care."

"So you don't need any advice about his business connections?"

"Why, I think not." He was nettled by the banker's manner.

"The only thing about it," said the vice-president, nettled in his turn by Hilliard's brevity, "is that if you'd said you *didn't* know him very well, I'd have offered you some suggestions. I'd have expected you to thank me — I really would. Under the circumstances, I can't very well go any farther than this. It was just that I hoped you knew what you're doing. Sorry I interrupted you."

"No, but wait a minute! I —"

The vice-president's refusal was firm and definite.

"I can't say another word. Not another one. If you know him, that's sufficient." And strode away across the lobby, leaving Hilliard dumbfounded.

Mr. Harmon, smiling broadly, half arose from his chair as the masquerader came slowly back to the table and sat down hard.

"Well," he said. "More business?"

Hilliard shook his head.

"On the contrary." His voice in it had a curious dulness which the broker was quick to catch.

"No bad news, I hope?"

Hilliard shivered.

"I'm not sure. Let's go on discussing the mine." He rested his elbows on the table, and his pupils were needle-points.

"Not much else to discuss, is there? It's the same old mine." He looked intently at Hilliard. "What's got into you, anyway, in the last couple of minutes?

You've lost all your pep. You look as though you've seen a ghost."

"Maybe I have," said Hilliard, with a short laugh.

"Well?"

Hilliard regarded him with an odd intermingling of respect and alarm. The respect was a hold-over from the past — from the early impression he had formed from Harmon's resplendent offices in New York, and Harmon's contempt of money. He had considered his employer, at worst, a weak-principled vendor of legitimate securities.

"Mr. Harmon," he said reluctantly, "I'm in a mighty awkward position. . . . But all our relations have been so confidential,— and I'm representing you in Syracuse now — we can't afford to let anything spoil this campaign, can we?"

"Not if we can very well help it. What's bothering you?"

"For over ten weeks now," he said at length, "I've been building up a reputation — you know what I've been doing; you know how much depends on it. I've handled everything according to your instructions — or rather, to our agreement — your name hasn't been mentioned once; I've been selling this thing on my own personality — holding myself out as the principal. Well, the man who called me outside just now — and he's one of the solid banking crowd up here — he spoke of you as though he knew you. In fact — to be perfectly frank — he called me out there to ask me about you. Now I don't know what dealings you've ever had with him, or with any one else up here, but it struck me that if there *is* anything between you and

Syracuse, or any of its fairly big men, perhaps it would be better if I knew it. You see, this thing I'm selling is so *darned* personal —"

"Who was he?" Harmon's voice rasped.

"Embree — of the Trust and Deposit Company."

"Oh, yes." Harmon smoked reflectively. "Yes, we know each other. What did he have to say?"

"It wasn't so much what he said as the way he said it. But in view of the particular sort of work I'm doing, and —"

"I understand all that." Harmon brought his brows together. "I'm trusting your judgment up to the limit, son. Just between ourselves, I ain't any too popular with this crowd, and I'm glad of it. Never mind ancient history — stick to the present. If you think it'll do any harm to the proposition if you hang around here with me, why, we can go up to your room. If you're so blamed high-browed that your friends can't stand *me*, why —"

"Nothing in that," said Hilliard, quickly. "If any harm's to be done, it's done already. I don't suppose there is —at least, I can't see why there should be — I only wanted to have the story all ready if the subject ever comes up. I suppose you've had some disagreement with these people?"

"*Some* disagreement," admitted Harmon, grinning. "These up-State farmers and I love each other like a couple of strange bulldogs. Still —"

"If it isn't objectionable to you," said Hilliard, hesitating, "I'd rather like to know a bit about it, Mr. Harmon. As I said before, the subject might come up later. It's almost sure to, now that Embree's seen you and spoken to me about you. And if you've

had any quarrel with this crowd, even if it wasn't your fault, and if it came out that I'm working for you, and there was any talk about it, you can see how I'd have to be on the defensive. . . . So if you could just give me a faint idea —"

"Plain English is a lot better than a faint idea," said Harmon carelessly. "I floated some steel bonds up here once. Prettiest bonds you ever saw in your life, too."

"Oh! And they didn't turn out well?"

Harmon's eyes twinkled, and his shoulders shook with dry humour.

"Not exactly. The company was too much like Silverbow, I guess — all float and no lode."

For a moment, Hilliard thought that he hadn't heard aright.

"What was that you said?" he managed.

Harmon reiterated it.

"Too much like Silverbow. Only they pumped the water out of it sooner than we will. That was five years ago."

At first, Hilliard was untouched by the shock; the force of it seemed to pass over him entirely; then all at once, as he was caught by the drift of it, his hands began to tremble violently; and his palms were clammy with sweat. His stomach seemed to drop out of him, and he was nauseated by the tremendous purport of his employer's cynicism.

"Mr. Harmon!" he panted, under his breath, "Mr. Harmon!"

The New Yorker looked at him in genuine surprise.

"What's the matter, Hilliard? You look sick! Or . . . damn it, man, if that's another one of your bluffs,

you're wasting your time. You haven't worked up such a holy disposition you *believe* in this mine, have you?" He moved uneasily. "I wish you'd wipe that pious expression off your face — or is it glued on?" He laughed fitfully. "Say, are you doing it on purpose, or is that some more of your Christly miracle?"

Hilliard's voice shook uncontrollably.

"You have the nerve to sit there and tell me —"

"Nerve?" Harmon's eyes flashed. "Yes, I've got plenty of nerve. Lost yours? I'll lend you some."

Hilliard put his quaking hands on the table, as though to steady himself.

"This . . . this mine!" he stammered. "You told me —"

"I'll stand by everything I've ever told you, Hilliard. I'll *prove* it. It's an area of mineralized schist with disseminated copper values. And we've got over a hundred acres of it. And part of a shaft, too." He laughed noiselessly. "Of course, altogether there's about five hundred square miles of that same sort of land in the same State, but what's the odds as long's you're happy? Tell *me* you aren't wise? Rot! Why, you knew all about it when we were on the boat!"

Hilliard's muscles were working in hysterical jumps, and his face was distorted.

"Y-you . . . y-you're saying . . . y-you're saying I've been selling . . . s-selling to my friends a piece of damned worthless property? *Are* you? Because if that's true, by God, I'll —"

"Shut up!" The big man was dominant, ugly. "Understand me? You keep your mouth shut if you know what's good for you! Didn't you come *up* here

to get square with your 'friends'? Your *friends!*" His accent was superlatively contemptuous. "You knew it wasn't a producing mine, didn't you?"

"You told me it was a wonderful prospect! You —"

"Well — it's still a prospect. Don't you know the difference?"

Hilliard fought desperately for his poise.

"I know what you told me! . . . I know it was a long shot, but I thought there was *some* value there . . . a lot of it . . . and you said the shaft . . . you always said the shaft was —"

Harmon reached for another cigarette; there was undisguised perplexity on his face.

"Son, if you aren't a mighty good actor, you're . . . are you going to claim you didn't *know* what this mine is? After all that whining and squealing of yours about your getting even? Then what in thunder did you want to come *back* here for?"

"To make some money — to get some fun out of it — to make good first and . . . and get even by —"

"Then why in the devil did you agree to all that bunk about your dying in France, and —"

"Don't ask *me!* I can't tell you! It was part of the game! I wanted to make fools of people; I didn't want to swindle anybody! I thought I was giving 'em *something* for their money! I —"

Harmon lighted his cigarette, none too complacently.

"The funny part about it," he said slowly, "is that I don't honestly believe you're bluffing. . . . Of course, that face of yours — But you *knew* it was only a prospect."

"But I thought it was a *good* prospect! Never mind—" He made as though to rise. "You've said enough. I'm through with you!"

The big man's jaw thrust out belligerently, and he caught Hilliard by the arm.

"Now, stop right there! Sit down! Sit *down!* Maybe you thought it was a good prospect and maybe you didn't, but you're not through with me yet — not until *I* say so. Don't you make any mistakes like that, my boy. Don't you go off half-shot — not *yet!* Remember our contract? Ever heard of promoter's liability? I'd certainly hate to see you get into trouble, but if you've made any wild statements about material facts —"

Hilliard was straining half across the table.

"You told me the ore was *there!* And I thought the *worst* that could happen would be to tie up this money for a few years — that's why a prospect's so hard to sell! I knew darned well it wasn't any whirlwind right now, but I *did* think they'd . . . they'd at least make something good out of it . . . eventually . . . even if it . . ."

"Ah!" said Harmon, sneering, "but you had every opportunity to learn the facts — ev-e-ry opportunity. It's not *my* fault if you went off half-cocked. *I* don't know what you've represented to your gang up here. *I'm* not responsible. All I know is that you've collected sixty-two thousand dollars, and turned it over to me, and I'm to give you stock for it, and pay you a rebate in cash. Maybe you call it a commission . . . it's a rebate! Read the contract. Read it carefully, while you're about it. Take it to a lawyer; *I* don't care. Any lawyer you like. If you've gone beyond

the facts, I'm mighty sorry for you, but I don't see how it affects *me* any. Do you?"

Hilliard had slumped wretchedly into his chair; his cheeks, which had been scorched with shame, were blanched with misery. He was sickened and abased to the point of utter prostration; his thoughts were running aimlessly about the grim axis of his chicanery.

"And . . . and after all I've done!" he said thickly. "After all I've *said!* Oh, my God!" His chin sank low, and his grip on the table relaxed.

Harmon was less at ease than he pretended. "Well, if you *aren't* bluffing," he said presently, "you sure are the biggest baby for a man's-sized man *I* ever saw. Brace up, there! You —"

Hilliard pulled himself erect with a final effort, and his fist gestured his accusation.

"You know what I'm going to do about it, don't you?"

"Yes." Harmon nodded, as he drew the smoke deep into his lungs.

"I'm going straight back to those four men, and —"

"No." Harmon wagged his head. "No, you can't very well do that, either — even if you're as shocked as you look. Not unless you're ready to tell the whole truth, and I hardly think you are. Look at it just a minute . . . look at our contract. There's some loopholes for me you could drive a motor-truck through; but you haven't got one as big as a knitting needle. No, son, the best thing for you to do is to take a brace, and go get another sixty thousand while the getting is good."

"Not necessarily!" Hilliard's high-pitched laugh was brittle.

Harmon allowed the smoke to eddy gently from his nostrils. "Yes,— necessarily."

"You think I'll raise my finger after this, except to . . . what do you take me for?"

"I take you," said Harmon deliberately, "for a short-sighted young man in a mighty bad spot. You don't want these folks up here to know the *whole* truth, do you? You don't want Cullen to get wise to this, do you? Or Dr. Durant? It wouldn't hurt *me* any — but after the record you made here before you got yourself kicked out two years ago. . . . Oh! don't jump! You don't think I've been asleep, do you? . . . I don't believe you'd get much sympathy. Not much! And I've invested a lot of money in you. . . . I want some big returns. And I pretty generally manage to get what I want. . . . Look me in the eye, son. I want you to calm down. Now there's only three parties to this deal — you and me and the world. You and me — and the world. Get that? And you and I have got to play straight with each other. No matter what else happens, you and I have *got* to play straight with each other. You help me get the money, and I'll help you get whatever you want. But when you throw me down, I throw you down, and we'll see who comes out ahead. I'll bet I do. What do *you* bet?"

Hilliard shook his head helplessly.

"You've got to remember," said Harmon in sardonic consolation, "that you're an awful easy man to describe. You can slip out of Syracuse just as easy as you please, and try your damnedest to make a getaway, and you'd have pretty hard work to keep away from the Pinkertons for twenty-four hours. And I've got

the evidence that would put 'em after you. So don't you plan to run away, son — don't do it."

Hilliard's judgment was tottering. Where did he stand in relation to Armstrong now?

"Well?"

Harmon snatched at the sign of weakness, and was instantly persuasive.

"Stay on another six weeks; make the rest of your killing. You've gone half way; run out your hit. I always like to see a man run like the devil to first base on a fly ball — the outfielders might muff it! After this is over, do what you please. That was our agreement, wasn't it? You'll have money enough to suit yourself. I'm playing straight with you . . . aren't I?"

"Yes," said Hilliard, with withering sarcasm, "you are!"

Harmon glowered at him.

"Don't you accuse me of double-crossing you, son! It's the other way round."

"You aren't fool enough to expect me," said Hilliard shakily, "to keep on trying to sell *more* of this rotten stuff! You aren't enough of a fool for *that* —"

"I can, and I do. You're in for it now, Hilliard, and you can't very well go back. You've collected money; you can't get your hands on it again; you can't make any restitution. You've lied your head off already; you can't do any better now than to stick to your first story, because the truth's a good deal worse. The truth'll blow you higher than a kite. The big damage is all done. Isn't it? What else is there? You'd better make your killing and make it quick.

And if you open your head for just one little peep . . . flooey, flooey, and the fat's in the fire. You want to live like a gentleman, don't you? You want money and friends and a big position somewhere, don't you? Somewhere quiet — after the storm's over? Well . . ."

Hilliard's head was splitting with the horror of it; he was passionately young, and passionately eager for success; he had revelled in the consciousness of his new achievements; and now, abruptly, he was on a lower plane than the lowest of his former failures. He saw, in a whirling vision of dread, the people of the city rising to denounce him; not merely for his inexcusable masquerade, so grotesquely built upon the dream of regeneration, not only for his vast abuse of personal confidence, not only for the base hypocrisies he had practised upon his quondam sweetheart, but also for this grossly profitable fraud. Dimly, he argued just as Harmon claimed, he couldn't be in harder straits. The worst was here; the present moment was the climax, and the catastrophe. A spasm of reckless fatalism shook him.

Harmon, who had been inspecting him critically, took out his fountain pen.

"I'll write you your check for commissions — shall I?" He held the pen poised insinuatingly. "And then we'll forget this little misunderstand, and start fresh. Shall I?"

Hilliard, rubbing his aching forehead and his seared eyeballs, felt life slip away from him as it had slipped when the monstrous cone at Neuilly had begun to sever him from consciousness, drop by drop.

"Let's see," said Harmon, with great attentiveness

to the figures. "Your twenty percent is twelve thousand four hundred, and that, less half expense . . . call 'em five thousand even . . . that's seventy-four hundred." He tore a sheet from his pocket check-book, dried the ink by waving it in the air, and flirted it over to Hilliard. "Put it away, and let's have some lunch. If you're afraid to have your friends see me down here, let's have it upstairs. *I'm* not sensitive, son; it don't pay."

"No," said Hilliard, dully, "and I guess it never will."

"That's the idea! Now you're talking sense! Come on up. I'll give you the new reports. They're working like beavers on the claim right next to Silverbow; know it?"

"No."

"Trying to locate a faulted vein," said Harmon, getting to his feet. "But the old vein didn't run the right way for us, anyhow. Almost parallel to our boundary line. Still, if you leave *that* out, it ain't such a bad talking point at that. I'll write you a memo. Come on, son, buck up and let's have some lunch. . . ."

At eight o'clock in the evening, when Rufus Waring knocked at Hilliard's door, it was opened by a man with a face to remember afterwards. There were deep-cut lines — almost furrows — by the mouth and eyes; and the eyes themselves were startingly luminous, and drawn. The man's complexion was chalk-white.

"Why, Mr. Hilliard!" exclaimed Waring. "What on earth's the matter with you?"

"Come on in," said Hilliard, and his smile was ghastly. "I've been waiting for you."

XVI

HE was waiting, hoping, praying for a blow from fate, but fate, which at other times had been ready enough for fisticuffs, and often premature with them, refrained from striking. The interview with Waring had passed without friction (and Hilliard had so contrived to present his data that Waring had finally declined the risk) and the night passed and the morning came, with its accompanying horde of old regrets and a new and sweeping inrush of fresh hallucinations. Hilliard was grim and haggard; sleep had divorced him, and his brain was hot and inaccurate. His motions were forced, mechanical; he dragged himself out of bed, and ordered coffee served in his room; he shrank from association with the clean, ingenuous world.

To his tortured imagination, he was a greater paradox than even Jekyll and Hyde; for he was Hilliard and Dicky Morgan, the living and the dead, without the boon of the supernatural to separate them. And yet he felt that the wickedness of what he had done was the wickedness of Dicky Morgan, and that he, Hilliard, the soul, was sitting in impartial judgment on Dicky Morgan, the flesh. He conceded the wrong; he conceded the penalty; nevertheless, his youth cried out to him for mercy. He wavered pitiably; and then, as he felt himself grasping for strength, stretching out the arms of his soul for courage and counsel, his eyes fell accidentally upon a book on the telephone table, and he stared at it blankly.

"Placed here by The Gideons" . . . hm! He had heard of the Gideons, that organization of commercial travellers which places Bibles in every room of all important hotels. Curious . . . he had never noticed this one before. Was it . . . could it be possible that he could find comfort *here?* Absurd! Sceptically, he picked it up. "A lot of help *this* is!" he said, aloud, and bitterly. The volume opened in his hands. Proverbs. . . .

Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

He peered at the words, and flinched. His eyes widened; he hastily turned over several pages.

It is as sport to a fool to do mischief, but a man of understanding hath wisdom.

The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.

As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.

As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.

The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

The way of the Lord is strength to the upright; but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.

The book, which Hilliard had dropped incontinently on the telephone table, fell sprawling to the floor. Hilliard himself, engulfed by the resistless surge of the Prophet's accusation, stood smiling weakly.

"'As the whirlwind passeth!'" he said aloud. "'So is the wicked no more!'" He laughed shrilly, and reached out to the larger table, and endeavoured to pour for himself a cup of coffee. The scalding fluid tasted lukewarm; his palate, like his heart, was numb.

"*It is as sport to a fool to do mischief . . .*"

Hilliard sat down limply, and buried his face in his hands.

Liebestraum!

XVII

AT the maid's announcement, Dr. Durant, who had been occupied with nothing more momentous than filling a pot-bellied calabash, rose hastily and went out into the hallway.

"Come in, Hilliard!" he said cordially. "Carol's off looking at somebody's trousseau . . . somebody's always getting married in Syracuse . . . she'll be in directly. Come smoke a pipe with me, and be sociable."

Hilliard, lingering nervously by the outer door, started at the kind voice.

"Why . . . why, that's very kind of you . . ." he stammered. Into the Doctor's eyes came a glint of greater interest; not in amusement at the oddly formal response, but in compassion for something not yet manifest. He put out his hand instinctively.

"Not kind at all — it's selfish," he said. "I need company. *Good* company. Drop your hat somewhere and come in."

"You're not busy?"

"Busily composing my mind," said the Doctor. He ushered Hilliard into the comfortable old study and motioned towards a squat little smoking stand. "All kinds of poison there," he said. "Cigar — cigarettes — pipe tobacco. Suit yourself."

Hilliard laughed affectedly.

"You call it poison? And you a doctor — and smoking?"

"Ah, but it's the pleasantest poison there is. . . . I'm always having to explain that to Carol. . . . Matches? Well, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"I?" Hilliard didn't look at him. "Nothing important, Doctor."

"But that's not quite true, is it?" The tone was gentle, but it filled Hilliard with portentous qualms. "You see, my boy, you're one of those transparent people who carry the burden of their discontent where every one else can see it. You've been enjoying a little attack of insomnia, haven't you?"

Hilliard winced.

"Why — yes. As a matter of fact —"

The Doctor attempted a smoke ring, and smiled at the dismal failure.

"I'm sorry. Business worries?"

"Why — in a way, yes."

The Doctor achieved a perfect circlet, and beamed at it.

"Something else?"

"A good deal else," said Hilliard, abstracted. "But that's no reason for me to bother you with it. I didn't know it was so apparent."

Silence.

"It's not my habit," said the Doctor presently, "to offer any advice unless I'm asked for it. Gratuitous advice never did anybody any good. And nobody takes it unless it costs something — and not often then. And I'm neither your regular physician nor your confessor. But if I had to make a diagnosis at this present minute I'd say that you need a preacher a great deal more than you do a doctor."

"I . . . I do," said Hilliard, looking up sharply. "Only . . . it's out of the question. Just personal things, Doctor — nothing I can very well talk about."

The Doctor made no immediate rejoinder; in a moment or two he took a pamphlet from his desk, and fingered it thoughtfully.

"Here's a little article," he said, "you ought to glance over some time, even if I did write it. It's a reprint from a medical journal, but it isn't about medicine. It's about psychology — I hate that word, but it's chained fast to my profession, so I have to use it. I don't think it could possibly do you the least harm. It concerns exercise."

"Exercise!" said Hilliard, dubiously.

The Doctor nodded assent.

"I wonder if it ever occurred to you," he said, "that the effect of exercise on the human being is mighty consistent. All it does is to increase capacity, but the right sort of it can increase *any* kind of capacity. Muscles, for instance, increase in bulk . . . or take the voice; that gains strength, quality, flexibility. Or even character . . ." The Doctor was intent on a wisp of smoke. "Well, the character is just as much a part of the human *being* as the voice or the biceps." He regarded Hilliard paternally. "Didn't you ever feel your own character growing round and sweet and sound by exercising it — in the interest of other people?"

"Perhaps I did, but . . ."

"Or," said the Doctor, "felt it growing the opposite by the exercise of the emotions of hate or fear? It's rather a hobby of mine." Here he gave the pamphlet to Hilliard. "This little essay is more of a preachment

than a medical document," he said, "but at least I know there's nothing in it to hurt you, because I wrote it myself. It's a sort of plea to cultivate all the more peaceful emotions by giving them regular training, and to let the distressing ones die of slow atrophy by not giving them any exercise." He smoked placidly.

"You'd make it an ideal world to live in," said Hilliard moodily. "But you don't seem to take into consideration the fact that our ideals are always a darned long way ahead of us. Too long to be much use — practically."

The Doctor smiled faintly.

"If they weren't," he said, "they wouldn't be ideals. The whole point is to try to grow up to them, and to realize all the time that you can't! Because they, too, grow by exercise . . . it's a habit they have. And that's the way it should be, isn't it? Perpetual struggle, perpetual improvement, but never perfection."

Hilliard caught his breath.

"Something else that's futile, then . . ."

"No, I don't think so." The Doctor's denial was very gentle. "Because if we were ever capable of reaching those ideals, we'd probably be so well satisfied with ourselves that we'd stop trying . . . and that in itself would seem to come near proving us incapable of any further effort." He gave Hilliard a glance of deep comprehension. "Like you," he went on, "I've never lived one single day up to my ideals of what I ought to be, and do. I never expect to. It's too much for any one man to expect. And also, like you, when I drop so far below my own possibilities, it gets on my nerves . . . I'm blue . . . melancholy . . . introspective . . . black . . . and all the rest of it. But — I'm

helped by the desire to try again. . . . Aren't you?"

Hilliard, very worn, very baffled, very wretched, and somewhat more unmanned by the Doctor's kind philosophy than by all the buffets of fortune which had preceded it, found this analysis of human nature almost a tangible support to lean on; found the Doctor's quiet sympathy almost a material bulwark. He drew a very deep breath, and was relaxed a trifle. . . .

"Yes," he said. "Yes, Doctor." A new conception of his own future course of action was slowly taking form in his mind.

"Now, your own trouble," said Dr. Durant, "isn't physical as much as it is spiritual. It's nothing but taut nerves. It's nothing but your struggle against the restraints you put upon yourself. How do I know? You've told me so . . . every time I've seen you. It's in your face, my boy. It's in your eyes. Constantly. And I won't prescribe for you until you ask me, but I'll make you a present of my pamphlet, if you'll promise to have the courage to read it. It isn't technical — take my word for it. And will you promise?"

"Yes, Doctor," said Hilliard, "I'll read it."

"Good! And let me know what you get out of it. And it looks as though the conference is about over . . . because if that isn't Carol coming up the steps, my ears aren't half as good as they used to be."

Both men were on their feet as she came in, swirling.

"Oh!" she cried to Hilliard. "I didn't know you were coming up tonight! Suppose I'd missed you!"

He merely smiled, and made no answer; nor did he speak to her until after the Doctor, protesting a sudden desire for solitude, had waved them hospitably out of the study into the living room. Carol was in the

old familiar corner of the sofa; Hilliard was standing by the fireplace, peering down into the empty grate. He coughed harshly, and an expression of utter hopelessness crept into his eyes. He turned abruptly.

"Well," he said, "just how much would you have cared if you had?"

There was a stately old lamp standing at height behind the sofa; its shadows were gracious and its light, as it crept through a shade of painted vellum, touched Carol softly, in a delicacy of radiance which was infinitely caressing. She seemed herself to glow in response to it; she was a tender radiance all by herself; she was palpitatingly young and living and vital, and yet she gave Hilliard, as he turned to stare gloomily down at her, an unusual impression of physical aloofness, as though the flesh were reticent of its charms, and conscious in its modesty. Her hands were lying idle in her lap; she bent her head, and viewed them studiously.

"Why, I should have cared a great deal," she said. "I'm always disappointed when I miss seeing a friend of mine. What makes you so pessimistic, all of a sudden?"

Hilliard reddened, and his eyes grew brighter. He resumed his survey of the fireplace.

"Friendship!" he said tardily. "What an accordion-like sort of thing that is!"

"Why, Mr. Hilliard!" Her tone was at the same time interrogatory and reproachful.

"Oh, I'm not speaking of *you*," he said. "Only of the thing itself. . . . It's big or little, close or distant . . . and *it* hasn't anything to say about it . . .

You'll have to excuse me — I was thinking out loud . . ."

"Please do!" she said. "You were on the way to be interesting. Think out loud some more."

Hilliard glanced sharply at her.

"Don't laugh at me!" he said, almost roughly. "For Heaven's sake, don't you know that the one time you shouldn't laugh at a man is when he deserves it?"

Carol's attitude was vaguely less suggestive of ease.

"I wasn't laughing at you," she said, "truly. But what you said was so . . . so queer."

"Oh, yes." Hilliard's accent was very flat. "I suppose it was. It must have been."

She looked at him keenly, and was still a trifle less calm. Her natural impulse was to soothe him, to divert him, and yet she felt intuitively that he was in one of those illogical moods in which no satisfaction is so great as that of suffering undisturbed.

"You're very unhappy tonight, aren't you?"

"No-o . . . it's not that, so much. . . . I've been talking to your father."

"He hasn't made you this way, has he?" she asked, sweetly humorous. In the next instant, as their eyes met, she expected to be rebuked again for levity, but he forgave her, and showed his irritation only by his abruptness.

"Hardly! But he set me thinking . . . and I had plenty to think about even before that, Heaven knows! . . . I always seem to be more or less up in the air when I come to see you, don't I? The last time we talked about friendship —"

"But that was at least a month ago," she said

hastily, " and in the meantime, you've been just as nice and cheerful as anybody. I thought you were all over your troubles."

" Cheerfulness wasn't what you asked for." Hilliard swallowed hard. " I . . . I came up here, Miss Durant, to have a really serious talk with you . . . really serious. It's been delayed too long already. It took me two solid days to get my courage up to it. And . . . and now I'm here, I don't even know how to begin."

She carefully interlaced the fingers of one hand with those of the other; her heart was beating storm warnings, but she realized that she had arrived at a contingency which couldn't be avoided, and therefore, she arrived as quietly as she could.

" Why not at the beginning, Mr. Hilliard? "

" Because I can't — and that's what makes it so awkward." He scowled heavily into the vacant fireplace, and held out his palms with a mechanic gesture as though to warm them at an imaginary blaze. " You know," he said absently, " your father is a very extraordinary man. Very."

The compliment to the Doctor had its invariable effect upon her; she glowed under it.

" I've always known that . . . I'm glad you realize it, too."

He stood erect, and faced her. " I do . . . it came to me, when I was talking to him, what a great privilege it must be for you to have his advice — and his sympathy . . . when you need it. And there are so few — so incredibly few — people who make you feel like that. One in a thousand. Or, one in *ten* thousand. People who lift you clear out of your trivial little self — and

make you think in terms of principles, and not of your own selfish ideas — and still don't preach. . . . It must be a privilege."

"It isn't only for me," she said. "He has enough sympathy for any one who asks for it. He isn't very worldly — you've noticed that? No — in some respects he's the most innocent man I've ever known in my life! He can't believe that anybody, or anything, is really bad . . . and perhaps that's why people come to him so. Of course, it may be that just because he's my father, I —"

"No." Hilliard shook his head. "I've seen a good many fathers, and next to mine. . . . My own was a wonderful man, too, but I never appreciated him. And seeing the Doctor has made me wish . . . oh, it's too childish to talk about!"

"If you were really as old as you try to be," she said gently, "you'd know that it isn't ever childish to be serious about such things as that. On the contrary! And yet there was a time when you wanted me to think you were well over thirty. Why, Mr. Hilliard, you're a *boy!*" Nevertheless, she regarded him . . . not as one would regard a mere youth, but with appreciably more uncertainty.

Hilliard had flushed warmly.

"That was when I wanted you to think a good many things that weren't true."

"About you?" Her inflection was an invitation to further confidences, and it drew Hilliard incontinently along the path he had planned — and feared — to take.

"Some of them," he admitted. "And some were about you. The fact is, I . . . I've come on a peculiar errand." He cleared his throat violently; his eyes sud-

denly adored her. "I've come to straighten all that out. Please don't imagine I've suddenly gone crazy or . . . or anything . . . and please don't take anything I say tonight to mean weakness . . . because, honestly, I've thought about this so much that it's rather disintegrated me . . . but I've got to tell you some things I don't want to." His shoulders squared in resolution; and at the look of pain in his eyes, of pain and despair, her whole womanliness went out to him — and had to be crushed, because she was, after all, a woman. "The first . . . and I'm going to stand just here to say it, please don't be frightened . . . I — I don't know if I even dare to say it . . . now . . ." His arms went beseechingly out to her — and fell limp. "I haven't even the right to think of it any more," he said wretchedly.

Her look to him was first of astonishment at his surrender, and, after that, of swift, ineffable pity for the unnamed forces which were influencing him. Womanliness hung in the balance; and then, in a flash of perfect comprehension of his plight, she knew that she could speak to him without reserve. He had passed beyond the bounds of conventionality; she put herself, mentally, at his side.

"If it hurts you to say it," she said, "I've known you've been . . . fond of me. How could I help it? And why shouldn't you have the right to think of it? Why shouldn't you have the right to be yourself? Why shouldn't you have the right to talk to me, and to expect me to hear you, and try to understand? You haven't thought that my father is the only one of us to do that, have you?" The reproof was exquisite.

"Ever since that day . . . the time you played to

me," he said, "I've fought against it — fought like the very devil, and —"

"I've known that, too — and you've come to see me so seldom. I'd hoped at least that you'd give yourself the chance you said you wanted."

He stiffened heroically. "You forget there was a condition . . . an imperative condition . . . and it's only fair to you to tell you that it's a condition I can't ever meet. Ever. That's why I'm here. I had to tell you. And even now, I might not have been strong enough to say it . . . I might not have had the courage even after I *had* come to you. . . . I might have gone on drifting and drifting, and hating myself for being a contemptible coward . . . if it hadn't been for the Doctor . . . just now, before you came in."

There was a profound stillness.

"Can't you explain?" she said at last. "I wish you would. You're making me feel very badly, Mr. Hilliard. You owe it to me —"

He had to exert his utmost will to make the beginning. "All I can explain is that I've made another mistake . . ." After the first great effort, the words came tumbling passionately, unchecked. "It would have been so infinitely better for both of us if I'd never met you at all. . . . My life has been a whole series of mistakes; this is the worst. . . . The *worst*. . . . Of course, it would be absurdly simple if I were going away from Syracuse, if I were going to leave you here, and go — but I'm not. I'm going to stay here. And I can't think it's decent not to tell you now that if you . . . knew all I know . . . what I've been, what I've done . . . you wouldn't marry me if I were the last man left to ask you! . . ." He gestured impatiently.

"We're childishly hopeful sometimes . . . all of us . . . hoping for what we know is impossible . . . what we know always *will* be impossible. . . . I've been like that — and what I hoped was that you could take me on the basis of what I've been for the last few months . . . since July . . . because that's the way I take myself. Just a man — a *man* — like Jack Armstrong. I hoped we could simply eliminate the past, and . . . I can't get away from it. It's on my heels every minute. It's what I *am*, now . . . but if I went much further back than that, you and the Doctor would both think just what I do about myself . . . and I'd have to say good-bye to you anyway . . . just as I'm doing tonight. I hope you can see that I'm not telling all this to you from any other motive except to be quite honest with you. Quite honest — for once. It may be that nothing else could possibly show how much I do care for you . . . that I'm willing to save you from another minute's misjudgment of what I am. And — and I care too much about you to let you live another day without knowing that I can't go on — it's over. . . . I'm not fit to be even your friend. That's all."

She sat motionless. Hilliard had turned back to the fireplace.

"Were you as bad . . . as that?" she whispered.

"Once," he said bitterly, over his shoulder, "I used to be a gentleman. But that was a long time ago."

She raised her head. "Nothing could ever make me believe," she said, "that you haven't always been just as I've known you — since July. Nothing can, and nothing will. What you may think about yourself makes no difference to me. *I* —"

"Don't!" he said, and his tone was agonized. "Don't you see —"

"I don't believe you," she said steadily.

Hilliard's voice was unstable with his great bitterness of failure. "You flatter me," he said harshly. "And besides — you're wrong."

She was up, and beside him, smiling bravely into his eyes, and he was flogging his will to keep his hungry arms from snatching her, from sweeping her close to him, and . . .

"What do you think women are?" she demanded, with sweet imperiousness. "Nothing but marble statues — or putty ones? Just made to stand around and let the world go past, without having anything to say about it?"

He retreated to the wall in self-defence. "Don't! Don't! I'm the one who's driven myself into this corner — not you!"

"But you don't have to stay in it always, do you?"

He stared at her in mystification.

"Don't be silly," she said, "and don't be unreasonable; I'm not!" She touched his sleeve; his expression was unchanged. "Don't make me think you *are* unreasonable!" she said compassionately. "If you're not satisfied, why can't you make yourself what you want to be? Instead of brooding over the past, that you can't help, why don't you think about things you *can* help? Why can't you go ahead a little longer, and do a little more, and try to be happy as you go along? *Living* is about all there is to live for, isn't it?"

He drew in his breath perilously. "But I'm letting you go," he said, dazed.

She stamped her foot in tremulous severity. "No, you're not; I won't allow it! Can't you see why? Do I have to tell you that? Well . . . because I want you for a friend even if you don't want me."

"Want you!" he cried, and remembered himself, and froze to immobility. "Oh — as a friend!" The note of hopelessness was in his voice again; he thought to detect a trace of Platonism in her statement — and he was cruelly put in mind of Armstrong. Armstrong — who had no closeted skeleton to rattle its grewsome bones in solitude.

"Surely, as a friend — what else did you think I meant?"

The young man shook his head.

"I don't know. Only I came up here to tell you I haven't any right to your friendship. I can't tell you why. . . . I haven't as much callousness as all that . . . but if I did tell you, your last atom of faith in me would be gone. And you can't afford to have me even for a friend — now that I've said that, can you?"

"Yes," she said steadfastly, "I can afford it."

"When . . . when I've told you . . ." His lips were parted in amazedness, his eyes roved dully. "I can't under — . . . I'm telling you I'm not worth the powder to blow me to Hades." He laughed oddly. "That's proved already, over and over again. . . . Don't you *understand?* . . . Carol . . ." His voice broke. "Why, Carol . . . I'm not fit to talk to you. That's proved, too. . . . I'm proving it *now!* I'm *saying* it — don't you hear me? I'm saying it now. And you —" He put his hand to his forehead, and brushed back his hair, which was strangely wet. "I

can't make it any plainer," he said, with helpless finality.

"No matter what's happened," she said earnestly, "I can't believe it isn't coming out all right. I'm not just a fair-weather sort of person; some day you'll realize that. And I know it'll all be quite right for you in the end — because you're going to make it so. I *know* you are. So if you'll just keep on living, and working, and trying . . . and . . ." Here her eyes were so appealing that his own dimmed to behold them. "And you haven't been so very dreadful after all, have you?"

Hilliard retreated once again, not trusting those hungry, lawless arms of his.

"I happened to read some of the Book of Proverbs the other day," he said, thickly. "There's a whole page there I don't think I'll ever forget. Did you ever run across that part . . . '*The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him, but the desire of the righteous shall be granted*'?"

"Yes." Her eyes were frightened.

"I'm just wondering," said Hilliard, with a terrible smile, which was entirely devoid of mirth, "if a man happens to be in a . . . a sort of transition period, you know — half way between . . . I wonder what's coming to him. I wonder what *is* coming to him. . . . I wonder if the whirlwind doesn't get him both ways."

After the street door had closed behind him, Carol went slowly along the corridor to the Doctor's study and knocked, out of sheer habit. His pleasant baritone came to her reassuringly.

"Yes?"

"Are you busy, dear?" Few men, on hearing her voice, with that suggestive catch in it, would have confessed to a previous engagement.

"Not when you're around," said the Doctor, appearing on the threshold. His tone altered suddenly. "What's wrong?" he said.

"Daddy," said Carol, "he's gone. . . . You saw him, too . . . what *is* it? What *is* it?" She was trembling violently; the big Doctor gathered her up in his arms without ceremony and carried her over to his favourite leather chair.

"Fires burning," said Dr. Durant, quietly. "Burning and burning and burning . . . like the ones you've seen down in the blast furnaces . . . white hot, and crucible steel comes out of them . . . strong enough to make permanent things out of . . ." He smoothed her hair, and she sighed shiveringly, and lay still. "And the steel lasts ten thousand times as long as the fires that made it. I don't know what's blowing the flames, dear, but he'll do — he'll do."

XVIII

HALF way down James Street, Hilliard, driving his runabout in utter disregard of the traffic rules, was reliving, moment by moment, and word by word, the two epochal conversations of the earlier evening. He had gone to Carol with the sturdy intention of betraying himself manfully and in detail; but in the Doctor's study he had perceived another, and what seemed to him a more unselfish method of achieving the same end. He had fancied that if he could preserve intact the memory of Dicky Morgan, if he could prevent the world — and especially that part of it personal to the Cullens and Durants — from knowing what a despicable thing it was that Dicky Morgan had done, he could save a modicum of pain for those who would otherwise be most affected. That is, he could save their pride, and their faith. This conception had interfered to make his talk with Carol somewhat aimless . . . he had been under the dual necessity of damning Hilliard, without implicating Morgan. And how bunglingly he had accomplished it! How inefficiently — how unsuccessfully!

But it was better to have done it bunglingly than not at all. Few people would sorrow for the crashing downfall of Henry Hilliard, but there were scores to grieve — and notably the Cullens and Durants — if the name of Dicky Morgan were dragged back from glory into sordidness. And so, to anticipate the whirlwind, he had tried to prepare Carol for the crash, and she, in all

her sympathy, had made the future harder still for him, because she had offered him hope.

On impulse, he checked the speed of the car, and swerved to the left; he was actuated by a sudden desire to run over to the University Club and see Armstrong. He had no definite plan as to what he should say or do; he merely craved to meet his rival face to face, and have it out with him. Man to man — and this time there should be no bungling.

Mr. Armstrong, it seemed, was in the library . . . and would come down directly. Indeed, he followed almost on the heels of the messenger.

"Why, hello, Hilliard," he said, rather stiltedly. "Did you want to see me? That's too bad — I've got to leave here in just a couple of seconds to catch my train. I'm going West tonight."

"I'll take you over," said Hilliard, shortly. "That'll save you a minute or two — and give us time to chat. My car's outside."

"Why — under the circumstances . . ." Armstrong's glance was diverted. "I don't think I can let you do that. Take me over, I mean. It's mighty kind of you, but —"

"What circumstances?" Hilliard, jumping at conclusions, was wildly apprehensive.

Armstrong looked him full in the eyes. "I'm going West on a business trip," he said slowly, "and I don't think it would be very appropriate for you to —"

"Oh — you are!" Hilliard felt streaks of ice coursing along his spine. "How far West?"

Armstrong consulted his watch nervously.

"Hilliard," he said, "I like to do things out in the open. There are just two reasons why I don't think

you really want to invite me to ride down to the station with you. If I'm wrong, it's up to you to say so. One of 'em is that Rufus Waring has asked me to stop off at Butte — I'm going a good deal further than that — and look up some matters for him. I guess you know as well as I do what they are. . . ."

Hilliard fumbled his hat. "I see. And — the other reason?"

Armstrong suddenly straightened; and his voice had a curious ring to it — a ring which electrified Hilliard, and awoke the most petrifying alarms within him.

"But does one ordinarily mention — certain kinds of people — in a men's club? I don't know how it is where you come from — but here, we don't."

Hilliard smiled vapidly; it was the utmost perversity of emotion, for he knew now why Carol had been so explicit in her sympathy . . . why she had been so meticulous to let him realize that she wanted him as a friend; only as a friend . . . and here was Armstrong, concealing with difficulty the triumph he was hinting at. . . .

"No," he said harshly. "One doesn't, but there isn't anything to keep us from mentioning anybody we like *outside* the club, is there?"

"Why — not that I —"

"Then I'll take you down anyway," said Hilliard. "And let's see if we can't try to understand each other."

It took a brave man to accept the offer, for Hilliard's eyes held little to recommend their owner as a prudent driver, or as a very pleasant companion. Armstrong, however, was already putting on his hat.

They had driven over to the station in silence. Hil-

liard, parking the runabout carefully, turned to his passenger.

"We've got ten good minutes," he said. "Your train isn't even in yet — go ahead and talk."

Armstrong shrugged his shoulders. "Don't you think it would be a little better for you to do the talking yourself?"

"I?" Hilliard laughed cheerlessly. "Anything I could say would be pretty conventional — under the circumstances."

Armstrong, after a momentary delay, put out a conciliating hand. "Old man," he said, "let's play the rest of this out like two sensible people. We won't get anywhere by bickering, and I suppose it won't do any harm for us to put all the cards on the table, and know exactly where we stand. Of course, you haven't known me very long, and I haven't known you . . . but suppose, just to help along the understanding, we take each other at face value."

Hilliard winced.

"Well — suppose we do. Then what?"

"Then you can't hold it up against me for stopping off at Butte on my way out. *I* haven't any motive in it — I promised to do it as a favour to Rufe Waring. It isn't a personal issue at all. I know exactly how it must appear to you, but . . . I'm not that sort of man, Hilliard. I wouldn't have dreamed of it myself. That's straight!"

The masquerader regarded him earnestly — and yielded to his evident sincerity.

"Way down deep," he said, at length, "I know you're not, but . . . what's that for?" He referred to Armstrong's outstretched hand. "Oh! . . . all

right." They shook hands solemnly. "At the same time, it would have been so perfectly natural for you to feel like getting whatever leverage you could —"

"There's no need of that — now," said Armstrong. His smile was proud and brilliant, and Hilliard withered under it.

"Well, I wasn't sure."

"I don't deny," said Armstrong slowly, "that at first sight this is a queer thing for me to do — to check up your property, I mean — when you and I have had such an intimate relationship as opponents. And I wouldn't for the world have agreed to it if it could have had the slightest connection with . . . with our own private affairs. It hasn't — it can't have. I give you my word on that; it's been settled without the slightest reference to anything else. But since it hasn't, and since Rufus asked me as a favour — and promised to tell you about it — and it's absolutely commercial —"

"That's enough. I'm glad you're going to do it." Hilliard's voice was gruff; it was a tribute to his companion's code of ethics. "Know anything about mining?"

"Not a thing. But I'm to go to a law firm in Butte — and of course it's only a formality, anyway. I'll probably find it's better than you ever claimed. But Rufe asked me."

"I see. Well — now about this other matter . . ."

Armstrong was watching the West-bound express as it felt its cautious way through Railroad Avenue to the station.

"Yes?"

Hilliard was suddenly ashamed of himself; he was forced to concede that his rival had the advantage of

him in poise and altruism. He shook himself free of the savage resentment which was stealing upon him.

"We're only human — both of us. Perhaps — under the circumstances — the best thing we can say is to say nothing . . . except that I wish you all the luck in the world. I don't pretend it isn't a hard thing to say — but I'm trying to mean it. And you certainly deserve it."

"And to you," said Armstrong, cheerfully. "And no bad feelings on either side. And I hope your mine makes a million dollars for you."

"Thanks," said Hilliard, grimly. "I'll need it. But don't be afraid to send Rufus your honest opinion — will you?"

"No — and I'll send it to you, too. That's only fair. . . . I'd better be starting."

They shook hands again across the wheel.

"You're a good sport, Armstrong . . . don't think I've got any resentment left . . . except a bit that I can't quite swallow on such short notice. . . ."

"*I* know. But you don't need to worry, old man. Your future's bright enough — as I hope to wire Rufus about Saturday."

Too late, Hilliard perceived that they were talking at cross-purposes — for Armstrong was evidently thinking about the mine. But there was time only for a last gesture of farewell; and Armstrong had disappeared in the depths of the train-shed. Armstrong . . . the victor, and the inquisitioner . . . was on the road to Butte!

XIX

WORK, hard work, the panacea and the salvation of those who are sore distressed, even this cheapest relief was denied him. He was left alone with his problem, wrestling with it once more in the black darkness of despondency, and knowing neither a means of simplifying it, nor a counsellor to whom he could turn for aid.

But out of the years of his testing, he had slowly and steadily builded for himself a background against which that problem, now that it was critically emergent, stood out in sharp-cut clarity. At first, he had been wholly ignorant of this; he wasn't sufficiently self-visioned to realize it. But his virtual expulsion from Syracuse two years ago had made upon him an indelible impression not confined solely to his passions; it had gradually hardened him where, in his egotistical being, he was most flaccid — in his contemptuous indifference to all judgments but his own. At the outset, it had made him bitter, but it had also opened his eyes, as time went on, to the infallibility of justice; it had compelled him to admit, however grudgingly, and however late, that he couldn't expect to mould the world to his heart's desire without first remoulding himself to fit the standards of the world, and he had sensed this most clearly on that recent morning when he had thought himself victorious over himself.

And beyond that, the tremendous mental pressure which the war had exerted upon him, the irresistible

power of his own sensitive reflections, the staggering conceptions of the littleness of the individual, and the greatness of the goal to which the individual is crawling, century by century,— these furnaces of thought had tempered his soul still further. Abroad, he had looked so often upon human suffering that it had ceased to affect him merely as suffering; it was the chastening of humanity, of which each of the living sons of Adam must bear his part. His own share, therefore, was inevitable; and until Harmon had lately come to scourge him, he had accepted the results of his dissemblance as just and due results, chargeable to himself, and to be paid for without whimpering.

In France, he had never thought of this great reality in terms of practical religion; indeed, he had never thought of it at all, except to admit the reality of it, and to curse the Prussian oligarchs who had brought it to the point of demonstration; and even now, when his moods were plastic enough to receive the most finely-drawn impressions, he was slow to comprehend that religion had anything to do with it. For once, he gave himself less credit than he deserved; he thought of himself simply as a man who had tried, and failed, and become a fatalist in consequence.

But fatalism had never been equal to the regeneration which had been wrought in Hilliard, and when he at last suspected this, he was then incredulous of his own sincerity. He could understand without the least difficulty how he could have gambled his life — which is to say, his body — for an abstract ideal; but he found it almost impossible to believe that he could deliberately discount his personal desires, and ambitions, and vanities for the sake of an ideal which concerned only his

own respect for himself. He was afraid that he had become a hypocrite; he didn't comprehend that he was merely an illustration of pure logic. His confusion was pardonable; many a man who, at the last gasp, would freely offer his life to his country, declines to buy his proper allotment of Liberty bonds the day before.

And yet, finally, his spiritual vision was clear, and unimpeded. Against the merciless background of the war, his problem was swept free from complications. That background of suffering and sacrifice — and Hilliard had both sacrificed and suffered — it was like the background of a master painting, which draws inconsequential details into the obscurity of itself, and throws the dominant qualities of the subject into light. Hilliard's ambitions, and desires, and vanities — those were the inconsequential details; and because he was still young, and timid of his own philosophy, he feared that he was a hypocrite because he saw only the things which were vital. It was a tribute to his youth, as well as to his experience.

At Neuilly, he had deduced that the care given to a wounded soldier isn't primarily on account of the soldier's personal feelings, but because of the soldier's potential value to the mass. He had come to believe that the individual has no value at all excepting in his relation to other individuals. He had come to look upon sacrifice as the only natural and normal outcome of the whole procedure of the war; and after he had ceased to be a part of the war, he had transferred this belief so that it applied to all the world. This conviction, the result of his training on the Western front, had put him in possession of theories which were the exact opposite of hypocrisy, for in his intention of im-

molating himself, he was simply carrying out the orders of his conviction. In the face of machine-gun fire, he had gone over the top without even realizing that he had a soul . . . today, he realized it, and was shy in its presence, and thought it was counterfeit emotion.

He conceded that there was only one thing for him to do, and he intended to do it, but he was harassed because he had so much time to think about it. Not since the first sickening shock of Harmon's revelation had he doubted his own purpose; it was merely the machinery of it which perplexed him. His confidence in himself gradually returned; he was abnormally calm and determined; he had no more idea of resisting his impulses than he would have had, in Flanders, of disobeying his orders. The thing was there to be done, and he, regardless of his own future, was there to do it. So had it been on the night of the wiring-party. . . .

Overnight, he had occupied himself with some elementary accounting.

With Harmon's check, his outstanding balance for expenses, and what money he could raise by selling his runabout and a few personal possessions, he had on hand a matter of ninety-six hundred dollars; Syracuse had entrusted him with sixty-two thousand. To compromise pro rata with his creditors — this was apparently his only resource, and yet how insufficient a reparation it was! He knew that it had been his duty to investigate the Montana property before he began to exploit it; he knew that his self-introduction to Syracuse had been blatantly inexcusable, and that not even the fact that he had been carried away by the drama of it could ever be excused. His intricate fabric of deception, now that he inspected it from this differ-

ent viewpoint, was flimsy — shoddy. He could be traced — if any one cared to spend the time, and the energy. If Armstrong — or Rufus Waring — cared to spend it, for example. Of course, there was always the refuge of flight, but in Flanders, men learn not to desert their posts, and Hilliard had learned that lesson among the first. Loyalty to the cause of fighting had grown automatic; flight was simply inconceivable to him.

Yes, he could gather his resources and place them, together with himself, in the hands of his subscribers, and their vengeance would be twofold; once for their loss out of pocket, once for the loss out of faith. He had deserved no leniency, and he expected none. But as for those who, without the financial entanglement, had respected him, and honoured him, as for Carol Durant and Angela . . .

Well, as for Carol, he was at least relieved of the terrific mental convulsion which would surely have fallen upon him if he had had reason to believe that she loved him. As it was, he had merely his own subjective canker — only the pangs of his own sublime defeat. Her shock at his disaster would be tempered by Armstrong's sane philosophy; at most, she would lose in Hilliard a friend of only a few months — a man she had wanted to retain as a friend, but — by her own admission — as that, and no more. This was a consolation . . . trifling and fragile, to be sure, but something saved out of the wreck. She would have more pride in Armstrong by the comparison. And Hilliard would have died for her . . . and now he was destined to live for her, but in what grewsome penitence!

As to Armstrong — Hilliard, marvelling somewhat

at his own tolerance, wished him joy. Armstrong was fine and clean and manly; he had well merited his victory. As to Mr. Cullen — Hilliard was torn with regret, but after all, Cullen's gullibility was what had made the campaign so childishly simply. As to Angela . . . who had really loved him . . .

"Oh, the poor little kid!" said Hilliard softly. "The poor little kid. . . ."

And perhaps he had never loved Carol Durant so much as when, at ten o'clock that sunny morning, he went up the steps of Angela's house to destroy a little girl's regard for him before it could be destroyed by others. Nothing could have been more in evidence of the moral awakening which Dr. Durant had prophesied to come from the moral abyss of war. Nothing could have proved more conclusively that in due time, even without the intervention of that war, the city would have been proud of Dicky Morgan. Because he was afraid, desperately afraid, that she was in love with him. . . .

On the door-step, he found strength in the memory of poor Pierre Dutout, whose last thought had been for his neighbour, and not for himself. In a way, Hilliard felt that he, too, was giving up his life as Dutout had given his . . . with a smile for the fate, and a blessing for the future. Because he was afraid, unnervedly afraid, that Angela, after all, was in love with him — and when he put a stop to that, it was the beginning of the end.

XX

AS he crossed the threshold of the long, over-decorated drawing-room, he knew intuitively that he had blundered upon a climax. This he sensed from the attitude of the three who turned towards him as he entered — sensed it before he saw what was in their eyes. . . . The atmosphere was vibrant, as though from sound waves which had passed beyond, and yet left traces of the swell behind them. The room was silent; but of a silence more confounding than a deafening turmoil.

Hilliard, standing on the threshold, was himself the centre of this atmosphere; he felt it partly because his mood was so flexible and partly because the three who faced him had simultaneously thrown their fixed attention on him, thrown it directly and challengingly, including him in the finale of the climax, while they stood motionless as statues. Unwillingly, he was a part of this finale and he knew it; he was dragged into it, enmeshed. He looked at Waring, whose expression was defensively acute; he looked at Angela, flushed, palpitant, and excited; he looked at Mr. Cullen, tight-lipped and frowning; and Hilliard caught his breath, as a swimmer who launches himself to a high dive, and walked composedly into the drawing-room.

"I hope," he said gravely, "I'm not intruding. Am I?"

The trio was galvanized into action; Cullen fairly

leaped at him. "Hilliard!" he said, "thank the Lord! You're the very man we want!"

Hilliard smiled straight into Cullen's eyes.

"That's why I'm here," he said.

Waring laughed loudly — too loudly; and the laugh stopped short, for Cullen was towering over him — Cullen blazing with indignant wrath, and with a hand resting on Hilliard's shoulder.

"*Now* go on," said Cullen commandingly. "We don't want any underhanded work around here, Rufus. I've told you that once already. Go on! say it to his face!"

The boy glanced back waywardly; glanced at Hilliard, and lost a fraction of his bravado.

"Why, I don't know that I'm under any obligation to —"

Cullen's mouth twitched sharply.

"Go *on!* You're conversational enough behind his back — say it to his face! Either you tell him or I *will!*"

The boy wiped his forehead. Beads of sweat stood out on it.

"Mr. Cullen . . . it isn't . . . it isn't *fair* . . ."

"*Fair!*" Angela's soprano had risen to a half-scream. "Rufe Waring, after what you've been saying, you talk about being *fair!* Why if you —"

"Hush! Angela!" Her father's admonition was peremptory enough to quell her instantly. He wheeled back to Waring. "We're going to get at the bottom of this sooner or later — and the sooner the better. I'm waiting for you to repeat what you just told us, Rufus."

There were tears of anger in the law student's eyes —

of anger and of impotence. His credibility was weighed down by the maturer personalities surrounding him, and he felt the burden, and weakened under it. He gave Angela a look of superb disdain, shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that settles *that!*" he said, and as Angela gave a gasp of understanding, and turned angrily white, he laughed metallicly.

Cullen moved nearer to him.

"Are you going to speak up or not? Because if you aren't . . ."

Waring folded his arms; but he still failed of the pose he planned, because his eyes and his muscles were traitor to him.

"No, I'm not! Not until I'm ready to! I'm not afraid of the whole crowd of you! I'm not going to be bullied and bulldozed into —" He attempted to brush past Cullen, the older man caught him by the arm. "Take your hands off me!"

"You stay where you are!" stormed Cullen. "Until you can —"

"If you lay your hands on me once more, Mr. Cullen, I'll . . . don't you forget *I* know what this means! I'll have you —"

"Oh, your *law!*" Cullen snorted it contemptuously. "For God's sake, don't snivel about it . . . stand up and take it like a man, if you've got any manhood *in* you! For a law student you're . . . well, don't try to run away from it, then. . . . Are *you* going to tell him, or am I?"

The answer was delayed; Cullen swung around to Hilliard. "Then I'll tell you myself. Know what this boy's been saying about you? Coming up to us when

you're not here, and trying to knife you when you're not looking?"

Hilliard, who had been standing paralysed, found voice.

"Why, I can guess," he said, curiously calm. "And don't be harsh with him, Mr. Cullen. As a matter of fact —"

Angela had sprung between them; Hilliard saw that her cheeks were tear-stained.

"It's nothing but jealousy!" she cried vehemently. "He's said horrible things about you! He's *always* saying things about you! He's said —"

"*Angela!*" Cullen almost fairly shouted it. "I tell you, this is my house, and I won't have any more of this infernal nonsense in it! Hear me? I've had all the nonsense I'm going to stand from anybody! Rufus, you stay right there! Angela, you keep quiet!" He turned to Hilliard. "If you'd come in a half minute sooner, you'd have heard this young whipper-snapper trying to make you out a swindler! Trying to class you with fake promoters and mining sharks! Yes — that's what he did! *You!* And look at him! *Look* at him! I want to tell you, Hilliard, it'll take more than *his* say-so to start anything around *here!* Don't you open your mouth, Rufus . . . you had your chance and you wouldn't take it! And I want to tell you right here and right now —"

"Wait a minute." Hilliard was deadly quiet; the only quiet member of the quartet. "There's no use in telling all the neighbours just yet." He regarded Waring kindly. "Do you mind repeating precisely what you *did* say, Rufus? Don't you think I'm entitled to that much?"

Angela had sprung between them: Hilliard saw that her cheeks were tear-stained

The boy flushed agonizedly; he was the accuser, and yet he couldn't meet Hilliard's eyes. It wasn't guilt; it was mere intellectual inferiority; and yet it gave exactly the opposite impression.

"Well," he said desperately, "I know hearsay evidence is no good, so I got it first hand — in your own room in the Onondaga, didn't I? You won't deny *that*, will you? I didn't just pick up rumours — I got it from *you*. Didn't I come there and ask you questions, and didn't you give me the data? Show me figures and everything? And I told Mr. Cullen the very next day, it didn't look good to me." His voice rose stridently. "All right, I'll say to him, and I'll say it to you, and I'll say it to anybody that'll listen to me! It didn't look good to me then, and it doesn't *now*. I told him you acted darned funny about it. And just now I've been telling him I don't believe it's straight. I've got a right to my own opinion, haven't I? Well, I don't believe it *is* straight! You're too blamed sketchy about it, and it's got all the earmarks of a bum promotion! *There* . . . Cullen!" The omission of the prefix to the father of his idol was the worst insult he could conceive.

Cullen's hand was still on Hilliard's shoulder and it was Hilliard whom he addressed, explosively, and with that particular sort of muffled fury which rises best from a set of circumstances not thoroughly understood.

"What this is all about is beyond *me!* Only, if this law minnow has gone as far as this . . . We've got to get to the bottom of it . . . you know that as well as I do, Hilliard. Naturally. The boy's as wild as a hawk. Heaven knows how far he'd go outside. This

has got to get cleared up! We've got to pound some sense into him. We —"

Hilliard was smiling vacuously; now that the blow had actually fallen, and the complaint officially lodged, he felt deliciously relaxed, content. Before he could contrive a reply Waring was strident again.

"Yes." The student's voice was thin with acerbity. "Yes, you think you're pretty smart — all of you. *Don't* you? I come in here to do you a kindness that anybody else, it seems to me, would take as a *favour*, and you and Angela jump all over me — why doesn't *he* deny it? That's what *I* want to know! Why doesn't he *say* something!"

Cullen looked at Hilliard, and made a swift deduction, and spoke it.

"He's waiting for the rest of it. Go on — you're only half through the yarn you told *us*."

"Oh, very well." Waring gathered courage. "You can have all you want — maybe *more* than you want. You'd have had it sooner if you hadn't started yelling at me. *I* know what I'm talking about; you people don't seem to realize I'm in the *law!* I don't go off half-cocked. I wrote to a law firm in Butte, Montana, that's what I did. I found out what was the biggest firm there, and I wrote 'em a letter. They answered it, too. I got *my* information right from the ground. I've got a letter that says —"

Cullen swayed forward, his hand outstretched, palm-upward, in a direct challenge of Waring's truthfulness.

"Where is it?"

The boy withdrew a step, and stammered: "I left it home."

"Oh, you did!" Cullen's laugh was stinging. "That's likely!"

"Yes, that's exactly what I did! Think I'd bring an original letter out of my office — let it out of my hands until it's time to make it of record? Not on your life! I've got it all right. And it isn't the *only* information I've got, or all I'm going to have, and don't lose sight of *that*, either. It says the Silverbow Mining Corporation owns some acreage, fast enough, but there isn't a mine on it —"

Cullen vented his abandon of rage on the empty air.

"Well, who in the devil ever said there *was?*"

"Why . . . didn't *you?*" The appeal was to Hilliard; and it was made in a tone of astonishment which would have been ludicrous if there hadn't been tragedy behind it.

"No." Hilliard shook his head. "You can't accuse me of that, at least. . . . The only mine we ever mentioned was one in prospect. I always said it was a prospect, with an old shaft on it, didn't I? And so it is! But an old shaft isn't a producing mine, necessarily. And — please let him finish, Mr. Cullen!"

"Well . . ." The boy had twin discs of hectic flame in his cheeks. "That's only a detail, anyway . . . they said it was . . . undeveloped . . . they said the shaft had been abandoned more than two years ago, because it wasn't worth much of anything —"

Cullen's hands were closing and unclosing apoplectically.

"For Heaven's sake, who ever said it *wasn't!* two years ago! We all know that! Give us some news, young man, give us some news!"

Waring was breathing hard, and his interest had switched to Angela, who stood adamant. Indeed, he was suddenly transformed to the status of a suppliant rather than that of a prosecuting witness.

"Well . . . they said it was offered . . . two years ago . . . to anybody who'd take it . . . for ten thousand dollars . . . and nobody'd take it as a gift . . ."

"Oh, good Lord!" Cullen was near to bursting. "Doesn't the fool know what a prospect *is?* Hasn't he seen the reports? And still he —"

"And . . . and the land next to it was . . . had a mine on it, the XLNC mine, that's in pretty fair shape, but *that* didn't signify anything. . . ." He paused for a moment. "And there hasn't been any work done on it, to speak of, for two years. . . . And the corporation report I got shows that a fellow named Martin Harmon's the president of it, and Harmon's a cheap Wall Street man in New York. The Butte people don't consider him reliable. And I've written to him four times — and he won't answer."

"Ah!" said Hilliard, startled.

"Well?" Cullen repeated his challenge.

"That's all." He gazed beseechingly at Angela, who sniffed, and turned her head away.

"All!" Cullen breathed stertorously. "And with a flimsy lot of rot like that you've got the unmitigated gall to start a slanderous story like this about Henry Hilliard! You've got the nerve to —"

"The astonishing part of it," interposed Hilliard, with coolness which astonished even himself, "is that every single item of it is true! Don't blame him, Mr. Cullen. It's true — every word."

Cullen shook himself.

"Of *course* it's true! Isn't it what you've told us yourself, in a different way! It's the *telling* of it that counts!"

"Now listen to me a moment!" Hilliard was impassively serious: the way to the dénouement was opening clear before him. He need only offer himself for judgment, and the future would take care of itself. "My purpose in coming up here this afternoon was to talk to you about this same property, Mr. Cullen. I . . . I had some rather important things to tell you about it. But in view of this new attitude of Waring's, I'm going to act differently. This won't stop here, and I prefer to have somebody look into it before it's any worse. I'm going to put myself in your hands. Rufus and Angela, I want you both to witness this. . . . Mr. Cullen, I'm going to give you a check for eight thousand dollars; it's my whole balance at the Trust and Deposit Company, less what I'll need to live on for a few days. I'm going to turn over to you twenty thousand shares in the Silverbow Mining Corporation to keep for me — it's my own personal holding. I'm going to turn over to you my contract with the owning corporation, which calls for the delivery of all the rest of the corporate stock on payment of a hundred and twenty thousand dollars, of which we've already paid sixty-two. I'll give you the corporation's receipt to me for that amount. And I give you my word of honour not to step foot outside of the city of Syracuse, nor to be for one single hour out of your reach until you've investigated the whole proposition from beginning to end. I *insist* that you make that investigation. That's on condition that Rufus won't mention this again, either here or anywhere else, until he's collected the facts! And I'll

tell you right now Rufus has given you the truth!"

"My dear man!" Cullen's tone was conciliating. "*We* know all that! We've gone into this with our eyes open. We're not buying a productive mine; we're buying a good prospect."

"Since I saw you last," Hilliard's voice broke, "I've reason to fear that it isn't as good as we hoped."

"*There!*" Waring was jubilant. "Listen to *that*, now! What did I *tell* you?"

"We went into it with our eyes open," said Cullen, after a pause. "You told us from the very first it wasn't an absolute certainty — good Lord, what business proposition ever *is?* Besides —" He sent a flash of scorn to Waring. "I don't care who knows where *I* stand on this deal or any other. I don't buy properties; I back men. I'm banking on you, Hilliard. I'm putting my money back of *you.* I'm counting on you to make good — if this Montana thing falls down cold, I know you'd make it right with me — if I'd let you. But I wouldn't. When I'm sold, I'm sold for keeps, and I'm sold on you. I'm taking the risk just as you are. So . . ."

"Thank you." Hilliard's appreciation was in the nature of a stiff bow. "I'm afraid you're exaggerating a little, though. . . ."

"Not one syllable!"

Hilliard was patently grateful.

"At any rate, I'm going to do as I said . . . you'll keep those things as a favour to me, won't you? As security, or evidence of good faith, or whatever you want to call it?"

"Nonsense! For a flare-up like this? Ridiculous!"

"But I insist," said Hilliard. "And I want you to

make an investigation — a thorough one." He smiled grimly; Dicky Morgan was safe for ever. "I know in advance what you'll find."

"So do I. Oh, well, I know how you feel. If you want to be whitewashed, I suppose I'll have to act as a sort of trustee for you — it's tommyrot, but if you want it, I won't refuse. Send me the stuff and I'll put it away for you where it'll be safe. And Rufus here —" They turned together to the law student, who was defiantly abject. "Rufus, I hope you've got enough sense left not to go peddling any more idiotic rumours until there's some foundation to 'em. We're going to give you every chance in the world to back up what you've said, but if you *can't* —" He paused significantly.

"You let me do the investigating," said Waring doggedly. "*I'll* get at the foundations for you."

"Do it, and welcome!" This from Hilliard. "I'll take Armstrong's report if you will — or you can go just as much further as you like."

Cullen had detected Waring's start of astonishment and chagrin, and his interest quickened at the by-play.

"What's Jack Armstrong got to do with it?"

"Oh, he's going to take a look at it on his way West," said Hilliard, diffidently, and added, with more generosity than Waring had anticipated. "Rufus and I both asked him to."

"Oh!" said Cullen, failing to interpret correctly Waring's reaction to this last statement. "Well, if you're really serious about wanting an inquiry — and I suppose if I were in your place, I'd demand it, too — I'm with you. Are you serious?"

"I've never been more serious in my life. Let Rufus

— and Jack — handle it together. Between them, they'll make rather an exhaustive study, don't you think? And they might turn up something that all of us would want to know."

"That's right! It's a thought." He coughed solidly. "Well — was there something really important you wanted to see me about, Hilliard?"

"Why, not now."

"Well, I wanted to see *you*. As a matter of fact, I was going to hunt you up this morning — when this merry little party started. I've got a couple of men down in my office who want a bite of this scheme . . . say five thousand apiece. . . . What do you want to do about it?"

Hilliard laughed unaffectedly, and Rufus stared at him, and envied him his composure.

"You keep the money until after the investigation," he said. "For all you know, I may be in Sing-Sing before they could have the funds ready."

"Well —" Cullen looked at his watch. "I can't waste any more time on this tomfool business. I ought to have been in the office an hour ago. Anybody going downtown?"

"I am — but I'll walk," said Waring sullenly.

"Can I stay?" asked Hilliard of Angela, in an undertone.

"I want you to," she said. Her eyes followed Waring to the doorway.

After they had been alone for a full minute, and neither of them had uttered a syllable, it came to Hilliard that the chief difficulty in being evil is to make an end of it, but that the chief difficulty in being virtuous is to begin. His brain was active, and his emotions were

placid; but to his mild perplexity he had no compelling desire to make a start. There was no restraining impediment working against him, as on the occasion of his interview with Carol; his impulses were merely lazy. Indeed, he was rather highly gratified at the course of things this morning; he argued that Waring's zeal and Armstrong's itinerary had relieved him from any necessity of an out-and-out avowal of his innocent fraud; it was much more satisfactory, since all the issues were so confused, to turn his affairs over to Cullen, and to await the inevitable verdict on an impersonal basis. In the meantime, he was deeply touched by Cullen's confidence in him; Cullen and Carol Durant alike had refused to believe the obvious truth; he wondered stolidly what it would have meant to him to have had such a reputation from his youth onward; the gratification now would have been superlative — provided only that he had been entitled to his pride.

"He's jealous of you," said Angela abruptly. "That's all — he's jealous. Simply wild with it. You know that — don't you?"

Hilliard started; for it wasn't an emboldening beginning. Not the least so; it implied exactly the sort of rivalry which he had feared, and which he had come to relinquish.

"Who is? Oh! Rufus Waring?"

"*Terribly* jealous. Perfectly *crazy* with it. That's what all this whole mess is about." She tossed her head wilfully. "*I* don't care; do you?"

The unreserved bluntness of it nearly took him off his feet; renewing the devastating suspicion that Angela had grown to care too much for him — too much for her own good.

"Why, Angela!" he said lamely. "Of course I do. It hurts me."

She hammered a gold-emboidered sofa-cushion with one tiny fist.

"Oh, he's jealous of everything and everybody. *That* doesn't count any more. Only it made me perfectly furious. . . . I wanted to *scratch* him . . . the very *idea* of his daring to say anything like that about you! Even if you *do* like me a lot!" She sighed heavily. "And yet if you stop to think about it, it was sort of brave, too — standing up to all of us when it was three to one, and he was wrong — poor dear!"

Hilliard looked down at her with deep affection, and troubled relief.

"As long as I've a defender like you, I wouldn't worry," he said, "but I'm afraid it won't be for so very long, Angela, that you'll feel like defending me."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Just a notion of mine. It strikes me that you're fonder of Rufus than you let yourself think. And he needs a champion worse than I do; I'm more used to taking care of myself."

The corners of her mouth were peculiarly sensitive.

"Such a queer notion!" she said. "Where'd you ever get it?"

"Oh, it came of its own accord. . . ."

"It's been such a funny day," she said, musing. "Rufus was funny, and Dad was funny, and you're so funny, and Carol was funny this morning and I'm funny now, and —"

"Carol!" he echoed involuntarily.

She laughed at him, enjoying his discomfiture with

the sweet insolence of a naughty juvenile; and it was noteworthy that her arraignment of Waring stopped short at this point.

"I know something about *you!*" she taunted wickedly.

"What do you know, bright child?" he demanded, red to the temples.

"*I* know!" Her tone was singing. "So do you! Look at the man blush! Why, you guilty thing! Why, you red *geranium!*"

He sat down beside her, staring at her vivid, flowerlike face.

"Angela, you little demon, stop laughing at me!"

It was fresh incentive; she only bubbled the more.

"I told you I'd laugh at you sometime," she reminded him triumphantly, "and this is the time!"

"Think so?"

"I *know* so!" All at once, she became demurely sober. "I'm awfully glad, honestly . . . it isn't out yet, of course, but everybody knows about you and Carol, especially since Jack Armstrong lost out, and went out West, just the way they do in novels. I'm just as glad as I can *be*. Only you might have given me a wee little hint — just to *me*, you know, mightn't you?"

"Angela!" He caught at her hand.

"Oho! *That* wakes you up, doesn't it?" Her manner changed to the maternal; if Hilliard had been in a different frame of mind, it would have convulsed him. "Now just be calm and tell me all about it," she instructed him indulgently. "Tell me everything — I won't repeat it to a single soul! I'm awfully excited about it. Please tell me."

"Angela! *Where* did you —"

She pouted instantly.

"Not just plain 'Angela'— put some trimming on it."

"Well — Angela *dear* . . . what's that about Jack Armstrong? Say that again — and tell me everything you know about it. Be serious for once. That's a good girl!"

Her eyes were mischievously tender; somehow she reminded Hilliard of that moment in the hallway of the Durants' house — the most precious of all his recent memories.

"Will you tell me if I tell you?"

"Yes. I guess so."

Her finger was upraised in warning.

"Say 'Yes, dear.'"

"Yes, dear," said Hilliard, writhing.

She settled herself with a little flounce of excitement.

"*Well* . . . Jack's asked her, and she refused him. . . . Flat as a pancake. That's gospel truth! She told me she'd refused him, and he told me the pancake part. And everybody's glad of it — he's a nice boy; awfully nice — but nowhere *near* as nice as you are. And he's just naturally gone away to get over it. And you're the only one left. So — that's finished; you tell *me*."

He stared at her unblinkingly. Had he really been at such cross-purposes with Armstrong at the station, then? The conception was illuminating.

"Everybody?" he repeated, red and white by turns, and mightily hushed. "What does that mean?"

"Just that. Everybody. That is —" Her accent

was deliciously superior. "That is, all the people one knows."

"They think . . . they think *I*'m the . . . the one."

"Silly!" She patted his head. "I didn't believe you'd try to camouflage *me*. No — honestly — isn't it true?"

He studied her for a moment. "What would you say if it were?" he asked soberly.

She returned his gaze with engaging frankness.

"Oh, I want it to be — I want it to be!" she said. "Carol's the sweetest thing in town, and as for *you* . . . well, sometimes I almost wish I could marry you myself!"

His heart leaped dangerously. One complication the less! Oh, the respite of it! Angela removed from the problem and — he sank back wearily — Carol coming into it again, and irrevocably.

"'Almost?'" he queried mechanically.

She looked at the floor; when she raised her eyes he saw the well remembered depths in them. She was half-child; half-woman — and the woman was speaking with the child's tongue. Her hand covered his; the warm, timid pressure was very assuaging.

"Yes, 'almost' . . . I suppose I can really talk to you, can't I? I always thought I could . . . well, when you first came here I was perfectly crazy about you . . . I am yet, in a way, only sort of boiled down . . . *you* know. Not like a sister at *all*, but . . . not the other sort, either. I thought it was going to be, once, but . . . I . . . I like you better than anybody else in the whole world — all but two. You don't mind my telling you, do you? I know you've thought I'm a baby, sometimes . . . I suppose I am. . . . I

. . . I liked to be kissed . . . by people I like . . . and . . . and . . . you know it's sort of like sunlight; I need lots of it. People have always fussed over me . . ." Here she gave a poignant sigh for her lost youth. "Only . . . it's funny, too . . . but one of the two people I do like better than I do you . . . in a different way . . . is . . . is Rufe Waring. He's jealous as a . . . a tom cat . . . but somehow I don't mind it from him; I almost like it . . . it *is* funny, isn't it? We're having perfectly terrible riots all the time now, but it's only because I've teased him . . . and then he was so frightfully jealous about you, and I . . . I teased him about that. He's just gone on a rampage today; he doesn't know what he's saying. He'll be sorry for it; he'll apologize to you, and me, and Dad, and we'll have to forgive him . . . *please* don't hate him if you can help it. It was just because he thought you weren't quite good enough for me, I guess. And you've got to give him credit for that, now, haven't you? . . . And . . . I hope you and Carol'll be awfully happy together."

"Dear girl!" said Hilliard gently.

"*Do* you understand?" Her eyes were very pleading, very misty, and Hilliard, being a right-minded man at this stage of his progress, was awe-struck at standing in the presence of consummate girlhood, womanhood-to-be, crystal and virginal and delicate as the petal of a shaded wild-flower.

"Understand? — yes. Can I wish you happiness, too?"

"Not yet," she said, adorably prim. "He hasn't . . . oh, we both know about it, but he's got to graduate from law-school first, and — after that . . . maybe I

can . . . travel a little." She blushed shamefully. "You needn't grin like a Cheshire cat — I guess I'll see Niagara Falls, anyway!"

"I wasn't 'grinning,'" he said. "I was smiling at you right out of my heart. . . . But I do wish happiness for you — always and always. And for Rufus, too — only that isn't necessary, because it's one of the great certainties. And I'm happier myself than I've been for ages . . . dear . . ." He stopped, swamped by the recollection that it was Waring who was to share in the demonstration of his perfidy. To wish happiness to an executioner — and not be a hypocrite? Incredible — yet true. Hilliard wished him happiness.

"What is it?" she demanded, alert to his altered expression.

"Nothing. . . . I'm just sorry I'm not a Mormon!"

"You're fibbing! Still . . ."

Hilliard rose hastily.

"Wait!" she said. "You can't go until you've told me one more thing . . . you don't honestly think Rufe's underhanded, now, *do* you?"

"No — oh, no, Angela. A man can be so upset that he can —"

"You know we were just shocked and surprised — and Dad's awfully quick tempered. And it was so *sudden!* We didn't stop to talk it over; we sailed right into him, and all of us got excited, and then you came in. We didn't know how frightfully jealous Rufe could be — he's been bad enough before, but this time was the *limit* — and it's only because he's a boy. It's . . . sort of primeval. *You* know."

"Yes, dear — yes!"

"And . . . and he did know us long before he ever

knew you. He thought he was protecting *us*. It was just an obsession —"

"It's all right — quite all right. Please!" He touched her hair lightly. "I wish I were as sure you'd always defend me as I am that you'll stick to him, Angela."

"That's twice you've said that . . . and you know what *I* think! I've told you. And . . . are you going off without telling me anything at all!" Her voice betrayed the irreparable injury of it.

Hilliard moistened his lips.

"Angela, dear, next to one other person I love you better than any one else on earth."

"That's nice," she said, with a sigh of perfect content.

He bent to her, but she eluded him.

"Oh, *no!*" she gasped in fluttering protest. "Even if you . . . but I've *told* you about Rufe now — you haven't told me about Carol, but it's plain as day — it wouldn't be *right!*"

"Angela!"

She relented swiftly; his voice was something to rely on.

"Well — just my cheek, then. Honestly, I . . ."

"No, dear," said Hilliard. He compelled her chin upward, and smiled down into her lovely, startled eyes, and stooped and kissed her forehead . . . then her lips.

"That's for good-bye," he said, "to the dearest little girl I ever knew. . . . We're both growing up, aren't we?"

XXI

IN the colourless days that followed, he listlessly set about the ordering of his final plans. Fortunately, there were few of them; his mind would never have been equal to intricate detail.

It was a slight consolation to him to realize that the city had a habit of judging men by personal rather than by financial standards; for all its pride and wealth, it would censure him more for his wrecked personality than for whatever money losses he had caused. He was prepared to endure that censure; and because he understood the provocation behind it, he was all the more eager to aid in the salvage. There would be more saved from the underwriting project, he thought, than from his character.

He had deposited with Cullen all he owned, except for his private belongings, his Franklin runabout, and a trivial sum for current expenses. The runabout he would offer for sale; it meant a few hundred dollars more to be divided among his contributors. Beyond that, there was nothing else he could restore to them.

As to his own immediate behaviour, he was irresolute. It had gratuitously occurred to him that perhaps the only convincing exodus for such a complete failure, such an infectious ne'er-do-well, was one of violence, self-inflicted; but he had dismissed the thought as unworthy even of himself. He didn't believe that Harmon would ever carry out his promised betrayal; not that he had faith in Harmon's code of ethics, but because he

trusted Harmon's horse-sense. If Hilliard were alone to be accused, Harmon would gain nothing and might, if he offered any adverse testimony, even implicate himself. Indeed, if Harmon should say enough to establish the proof of Hilliard's identity, Harmon would place himself in the dangerous status of an accessory before the fact. No . . . this was the sane procedure; to let the memory of Dicky Morgan rest in peace, and to let the brunt of anger fall on Henry Hilliard, who was a nobody from nowhere, with a lying face, a lying tongue, and no claque to mourn at his exit.

But then there was Angela's startling allegation . . . she had declared that "everybody" in town knew all about Hilliard and Carol. "Everybody" regarded him as the victorious contender, and yet he knew, in secret, that he was the vanquished, and without honour. Besides, in a day or two "everybody" would have a different opinion. He had tried to explain himself to Carol, and he had failed; and in the light of Angela's revelation, it was difficult to decide whether Carol herself, in protesting that she wanted to retain him as a friend, had meant that and nothing more, or that and a great deal more. But no matter what she had intended to convey, no matter what she had intended to conceal, he dared not go to her again, he dared not see her and speak to her, for if he lied to her . . . but he couldn't lie to her now, and every word of truth would prove a boomerang. He was trapped; and although his heart was breaking for the love he had almost won a second time, he remained steadfast to the ideals he had created. If Carol were to lose him as a suitor, she should never know that her first and foremost suitor had gone to the devil.

He told himself fiercely that was the one definite and permanent way out of it. . . . Nobody would then have cause to gossip about Dicky Morgan; no one — after the first natural flood of excitement and denunciation — would remember very much about Henry Hilliard. It would save such a deal of needless trouble; it would save such a wearisome amount of shame.

But against the pitiless background of the war, self-destruction as a means of avoiding personal difficulties, self-caused, seemed curiously repellent — curiously cheap.

No . . . it was a part of his own grievance that Carol and the others must grieve, too; he had a dual responsibility to society. He had no right to leave these matters clouded by any uncertainty of motive. Syracuse had a right to know the facts; and if the facts brought pain to those he loved, why, that was something he should have thought about in June, and not in November.

As he clung comfortless to the last slipping hours of the reputation he had so carefully builded, he knew that it wasn't the punishment of the law that he dreaded, it was the ostracism which would accompany it. It wasn't his own shame which gripped him, it was the consciousness of the shame which would attach to his friends. And so, for a day or two, all his faculties were strung upon the attitude of the public towards him; he was watching frantically for the first faint signs of adverse demeanour, and bracing himself for the shock which was unavoidably to come. For secrets will out, and although he had no reason to expect Waring to break his pledge, he knew that when rumour smoulders among as many as four people, there comes — there

always comes — a moment in which it bursts forth in spontaneous combustion.

And presently he sensed a subtle super-charging of the atmosphere whenever he met a male acquaintance; he couldn't deny that the greeting of his bankers was suddenly less informal, more impersonal; he perceived, with a sinking spasm of foreboding, that fewer people stopped to chat with him on the street and that those who still were willing to halt and pass the time of day were uncommonly restive about it. Even at church, he was conscious that his arrival created a little stir of unecclesiastical interest, and he imagined that as he dropped his golden contribution in the plate, the holder of it turned his nostrils from the tainted money. Syracuse hadn't yet arrayed itself officially against him, and a part of Syracuse was outwardly as pleasant as ever, but there wasn't the slightest question that the story had leaked out, and that it had got itself adherents. The end was plainly in sight; Armstrong's report was due. Only the Cullens and the Durants and one or two other of the James Street families were quite as cordially attentive as formerly; and to Hilliard's vast chagrin, they rather overdid it . . . he seemed to feel in the steady warmth of their friendship a sort of blindly unseasonable resolution to support him, whether or no. This, infinitely more than the cooling manner of the majority, galled him incessantly. It was as though they rallied to his defence before the need of it . . . it was as though they conceded in advance the necessity of such a defence.

So Hilliard waited, waited . . . smiling upon the world his hollow smile, carrying through the city the body of a knave and the face of a martyr and the soul

of a gentleman . . . and in the watches of the night, he was perplexed to find that his eyes were sometimes wet, but never when he was thinking of himself — always when he was thinking of Angela, or Carol, or — unexplainably — of a common-enough representative of the French *bourgeoisie* named Pierre Dutout.

On the eighth day, he chanced to meet Dr. Durant by accident in front of the Physicians Building at high noon.

"Hello, there! You're just in time," said the Doctor, cheerfully. "I'm going over to the University Club for lunch. Won't you join me?"

Hilliard reddened; his raw sensibilities told him that the Doctor wasn't actuated by hospitality alone.

"Why," he said, "I'd like to, but —"

"I want your advice," declared the Doctor, ignoring the implied objection. "I'm the worst business man in the world — you probably know that by this time. And I trust my friends for friendship; but when I want advice, I go to an expert. So you qualify on both counts. Come along over."

Hilliard was flattered, but not deceived.

"I'm not sure that my advice is worth anything half as expensive as a luncheon, Doctor."

The older man took him by the arm, and impelled him across the street.

"That depends on your appetite," he laughed. "Come along, and help me out on a decision I've got to make. About an investment."

Hilliard hung back for a moment, while suspicion dawned on him.

"What sort of investment, Doctor?" he queried.

"You come and sit down," urged the Doctor, seductively. "And we'll talk it over later. But first of all —" He patted his waistcoat. "Let's eat."

Hilliard was almost too grateful to speak; the Doctor's stratagem was patent, but in all chivalry the invitation couldn't be declined. Once inside the doors of the club, however, he became panicky; for his first sweeping reconnoissance included half a dozen men whose late behaviour had indicated that they knew. And Hilliard had all a metropolitan's sensitiveness to the spirit and to the ethics of a men's club. He faltered on the very threshold; and if any other man than Dr. Durant had been his sponsor, he would have fled incontinently, so as not to disturb that rare, indescribable atmosphere which only clubmen understand and respect.

But the Doctor was inexorable; he drew Hilliard under the mantle of his own unassailable position, and ploughed ahead with the utmost serenity. He nodded here and there, he spoke to members right and left; he bowed across the room; always his personality, rather than his person, seemed to be escorting and guarding Hilliard; and Syracuse couldn't decline to acknowledge a man who was under the Doctor's adequate protection. Those who spoke to the Doctor also spoke to Hilliard; there was no way out of it, and they spoke as casually as they could. They also nodded to him, and bowed, but when his back was turned, they became low-voiced and communicative, and he knew it. When at length the pair had gained the table nearest the window, Hilliard felt that he had undergone a strenuous ordeal; he was consumed by gratitude to his implacable host, but he had no inclination to repeat it.

The Doctor was scrutinizing the menu; Hilliard, who faced the window, threw a glance over his shoulder. As he had fancied, the eyes of the room were upon him. They reminded him, oddly enough, of machine-gun batteries.

"The table d'hôte's good enough for me," said the Doctor presently. "And you?"

"And for me, too," said Hilliard.

"Anything to drink?"

"No, thanks."

The Doctor dropped the card; and sat up straighter.

"Well, I won't keep you in suspense — I want some advice. As I said, I'm the worst business man in the world, Hilliard. I'm a mere child in your hands — so please treat me tenderly." He regarded his companion with mingled humour and seriousness. "James Cullen has been telling me about a wonderful plan of yours to make a nice shiny gold eagle grow where only a silver quarter grew before. In fact, he talked so enthusiastically that he's got me thinking about it, too. . . . I rather resent your not telling me about it yourself."

Hilliard recoiled.

"You shouldn't do that!" he said. "I . . . I wouldn't have tried to interest you in it, Doctor, because —"

"Oh, I can see your reasons," deprecated the Doctor, smilingly. "You didn't want to trespass on a purely social relationship. I appreciate that. But the point is, I've got a few thousand dollars I don't exactly know what to do with. It's a rather extraordinary situation for a professional man, isn't it? I'll have to admit I'm puzzled about it myself. And the novelty

might lead me into temptation. So I thought I'd ask your advice."

"You can have the best I've got," said Hilliard, averted. "But I'm not guaranteeing that it has much value, Doctor."

The Doctor nodded; drummed on the table.

"Do you ever let friendship interfere with business?"

"Often, sir."

"Will you let it interfere now — if you think you're justified?"

"Yes, Doctor. . . . I can promise that much, anyway."

The Doctor showed his approval.

"Well, tell me perfectly frankly, then,— is yours the sort of proposition you'd let a man invest in, if you knew he had precious little money to lose? But if you also knew that he were quite willing to take the same chance as the rest?"

Hilliard shook his head slowly, and continued to shake it as he replied.

"I can't say that it is, Doctor. On the contrary — I don't think it's that sort of proposition at all."

Dr. Durant's brows were contracted.

"But in the ordinary run of commerce, Hilliard — suppose the question of friendship didn't enter into this, and I hadn't brought up that subject — would you, in choosing your list of subscribers, and selecting the people you'd like to have share the plan with you, put a man like myself on any different footing than James Cullen? Or wouldn't you?"

"Doctor Durant," Hilliard's voice was slow, "is it possible you haven't heard the . . . the criticism

that's been flying around town about this syndicate of mine? Haven't you heard that there's some question whether it's quite sound? "

"I've heard it — yes." The Doctor was amazingly indifferent.

"Well — do you still think this is any time to discuss the possibility of your coming in with us? "

The Doctor's voice was strong, encouraging.

"I think it's the best time, and the only time — for me, that is. I've lived too long to be affected by chance rumours. And besides, I've got the money now."

"But are you sure you know what it's all about? The criticism, I mean."

"I don't know anything about it at all. That's exactly why I'm coming to you for advice."

"On . . . what grounds? "

The Doctor gesticulated.

"Why, the only grounds I *could* have. You certainly ought to know more about it than any one else does. And therefore, I'd take your word for it before I'd take the rumour. I want to know if you'll accept me as one of the members of your syndicate."

Hilliard gasped and pushed himself back from the table.

"*Doctor!* "

"In a way," said Dr. Durant genially, "I'm putting you at a great disadvantage — I know *that*. But, as I said, I'm not a business man. I have to be guided more or less by instinct. Your business is to know all about these things. So I'm coming to you for your honest opinion, and I know you'll give it to me . . . do you think I'm quite eligible? "

Hilliard's heart was in his mouth.

"Why," he stammered, "at this particular time — I can't advise you —"

"Now, don't be too cautious," warned the Doctor. "All I want is your expert opinion, without any qualifications attached. I'm not asking you if this is the best investment the world has ever seen — I'm asking if it's reasonably safe, as such things go, with a chance of something really good if your best expectations work out as you hope."

Hilliard's throat was dusty, and his reply came with some difficulty.

"In spite of . . . everything, you'd . . . you'd take my word for it, Doctor?"

"Yes, I would, and I've got Cullen and my own daughter to agree with me. I don't think that the three of us would make the same mistake about the same man at the same time. One of us might, but not all three! Certainly I'll take your word for it. Would you let me invest say . . . seventy-five hundred dollars?"

Hilliard gulped.

"Not now — no, sir."

The Doctor expressed a mild astonishment.

"Suppose I'd asked you a week ago — before this miserable story began to go the rounds?"

"I'd have taken it then — perhaps."

The Doctor's eyes snapped.

"You're retiring under fire — are you?"

"No, sir — digging in."

"Simply because of a fatherless report?"

"No, its parents are pretty lively. And the . . . the recent developments haven't been what we . . . expected. It isn't on account of the rumours that I can't

let you in, Doctor — it's on account of the facts."

The Doctor remained silent until the waiter had served them, and departed. Then he looked keenly across the table.

"Cullen isn't going to lose his money, is he?"

"Not all of it, anyway."

"Some of it?"

"You never can tell."

"And are you obligated in any way to make good his loss? You personally, I mean? Either legally or morally?"

Hilliard sighed dispiritedly.

"Why, seeing that not one of these men ever saw the property, or knows anything about it, or about copper mining in general, except what I told them, I feel morally responsible for every cent that's lost, whether I've any legal responsibility or not. That is, I'd make it good — if I could. Of course, I'm hoping that nothing *will* be lost, but —"

The Doctor's eyes brightened.

"Do Cullen and his friends understand that you hold yourself responsible?"

"I think not. I haven't said so to them yet."

"It isn't a part of your bargain?"

"No, sir."

"They're paying you a brilliant compliment, then."

"I realize that fully," said Hilliard, writhing. The Doctor toyed with his fork.

"You'd do the same for me, I suppose, if I were one of your group?"

"Why, of course — if you *had* been."

"But you wouldn't advise me to go into it, you say, under present conditions?"

"No, sir, I wouldn't. I wouldn't permit it."

"I thought you wouldn't." The Doctor sipped a glass of water thoughtfully. "And that leaves me with seventy-five hundred dollars I still don't know what to do with. Well, if you can think of any reasonable use for it within the next few weeks, let me know, will you? I'll keep it intact until I hear from you."

Something in his tone snatched at Hilliard's heart, he went as white as paper.

"Dr. Durant!"

The Doctor smiled slightly. "Any reasonable use, I said. Any form of investment that —"

Hilliard was practically tongue-tied.

"Dr. Durant . . . if I . . . if I see what you mean . . . I . . . if you're willing to take my advice, why —"

"I'm sixty-three years old," said the Doctor, calmly, "and I've made a fool of myself in every conceivable way but one. . . . That's in my own field; I'm a diagnostician. I've watched you very carefully, young man. . . . I think perhaps you need as much advice as I do, of a different variety. So here it is — when you — want encouragement, or a medical prescription, or a good cigar and a chat, or a quiet evening with an old man and a girl who plays the piano rather pleasantly, *or* seventy-five hundred dollars which you've already shown you won't let me invest unwisely, come and see me. Now let's drop business. Not another word: I'm tired of it. You're through as an expert; let's get back to old-fashioned friendship. Speaking of coming to see me,— Carol's wondering if you're trying to slight her. We've seen very little of you lately? It's

a week now, isn't it? And you've never even told me how you liked my pamphlet?"

When, sustained and soothed by that peaceful hour, by the Doctor's trust in his integrity, and by the sedative of a long and untroubled stroll out over the hills to eastward, he returned to the hotel, the room clerk greeted him with faint superciliousness.

"Somebody's been keeping after you on the telephone all the morning," he said loftily. "New York call. Couldn't locate you. And here's some telegrams for you . . ."

There were three of them; at sight of the signature of the first, Hilliard's eyes narrowed.

ARRIVING SYRACUSE 4.15 PLEASE MEET ME AT TRAIN AND STOP ALL WORK IN THE MEANTIME IMPERATIVE

HARMON

Hilliard's eyelids fluttered; this was evidently the initial result of Rufus Waring's efforts, and of those many letters he had written Harmon. He tore open the second envelope; the message was again from the broker, sent obviously from the Grand Central Terminal just before train-time.

MOST IMPORTANT NEWS RECEIVED AM JUST LEAVING HAVING WIRED YOU MEET ME AT STATION 4.15 FIND OUT WHO ROB WARING IS AND WHAT HE WANTS DO ALL YOU CAN TO STAVE OFF FURTHER INQUIRY ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE NOT TALK TO ANY ONE UNTIL

I SEE YOU HAVE CONTRACT AND ALL OTHER DATA WITH YOU SHALL HAVE TO LEAVE ON SHORT NOTICE HARMON

And the third was from Albany:

LOCATE ROB WARING IF POSSIBLE AND ARRANGE MEETING SEVEN TONIGHT URGENTLY IMPERATIVE HARMON

Hilliard folded the three sheets methodically and put them in his pocket. He glanced at his watch; it showed a quarter to four. He had no dependence on Harmon, and no fear of him; he felt no obligation to Harmon, no sense of duty. To be sure, he had a cynic's curiosity to see what was in the middle of the whirlwind, but that of itself wasn't strong enough to send him to a rendezvous with a man he despised and loathed.

"If I go," he said to himself, "I'll be sorry; and if I don't go . . . why, if I don't go, I'll always wonder if it would have done any good!"

For himself, there was nothing promising in the situation. But on the millionth chance that something of benefit to his subscribers might come out of it — on the millionth chance that Harmon might be frightened or persuaded into compromise —

So he went.

XVII

THE very first passenger to reach the platform was Harmon; indeed, he had been fretting in the vestibule for half an hour, intent on saving a useless fraction of a second when the train stopped. At sight of Hilliard, he beamed beneficently — all his earlier belligerence forgotten.

"Hello!" he said. "Glad to see you, son. Got all my messages, did you?"

He shook hands with great urbanity; Hilliard's grasp was hardly responsible.

"I got three," said Hilliard, dignified and non-committal; and he continued to inspect his employer with ill-concealed disfavour and distrust.

"Well, that's all I sent. Now, where can we go sit down and talk, for a couple of hours? There's a lot to go over, but I want to take the 9.40 west. Not to the Onondaga — I'd rather go somewhere quieter. Got your car here?"

Hilliard shook his head.

"No. How about the Kirk? That's the nearest place that's any good."

"Suits me all right if it does you."

"Any luggage?" They were crossing the tracks to the waiting-room; and Hilliard, in spite of himself, couldn't refrain from the solicitude which any right-minded resident of a city feels for the transient just arrived.

"Only this Gladstone. I can check that here, I

guess. Well, I'm certainly glad to see you. Say, were you able to make a date with this Waring person? It was pretty short notice, but you're such a live wire —"

Hilliard, fully comprehending the nature of the compliment, smiled faintly. The person of the broker was physically repulsive to him; unconsciously he edged further away.

"Not yet. But I've left word at his house for him to call me at the hotel, and I'll telephone to the information clerk from the Kirk where he can reach me. He's sure to be in around five or half past."

"I hope so." Harmon swung his heavy bag to the brass-lined counter, and tossed out a dime with a philanthropic gesture which made the attendant glare at him. "Who in thunder is he, anyhow?"

Hilliard had reason to be reticent with his facts, and he preferred not to be too specific at the outset.

"He's a law student — an old friend of the Cullens. He's looking after some of their interests, in one way and another."

"Oh! Working up a practice! Am I right or am I wrong? Well! the way he's been bombarding me with fresh letters, you'd think he was on a congressional investigating committee! Say! There's one thing I'd like to find out — how'd he know *I*'m in the thing? You didn't tell anybody, did you? Our agreement —"

Hilliard was guiding him to the street.

"Why, he probably got hold of your name when he wrote to some law correspondents of his in Butte about the property; and they looked it up for him. I'd judge they must have gone into it rather thoroughly."

"They did! Humph!" The broker's tone held less

of rancour and more of disappointment than Hilliard would have expected. "And they made an unfavourable report on it, did they?"

"Unfortunately, for you, they did . . . as you very well know."

Harmon turned on him sharply.

"What do you mean 'unfortunately for me'?"

Hilliard turned into a wide doorway.

"We go in here. . . . Why, it puts the quietus on any last hope of yours that there's still some business to be done in Syracuse, doesn't it? I should think that's about as plain as daylight."

Harmon's brows went up.

"Wha-a-t?" he said, and then, promptly, "Oh, yes — of course. But you've been such a live wire from start to finish, I thought the harder the proposition, the better you'd —"

"Oh, don't make me wish I hadn't taken the trouble to meet you!" snapped Hilliard. He slipped into the first unoccupied booth; Harmon followed him stupidly. "The thing's done for, and you know it. Don't act so innocent, Mr. Harmon — it isn't becoming to you, and it isn't helpful to me. We're in a position to talk English, I should imagine."

Harmon's eyes were very small and bright.

"No, but . . . what's he been saying around here?"

"Saying it's a fake promotion. What else *would* he say? He's quite intelligent. That's why it's unfortunate for you, and that's why we don't need to fool ourselves any further — isn't it?"

As Harmon removed his hat, he appeared to be somewhat warmer than the temperature warranted. His

round face was now preternaturally blank; but his urbanity had increased until he was on the verge of fawning.

"So he's been giving out a pretty bad story, has he?"

"Only the bare facts. And if you don't know it already, I'll tell you now that he's got a representative out there on the ground, so that —"

Harmon bit his lip. "A representative? When did that happen?"

"Nearly a week ago. It's about time to hear from him, and then the goose *will* be cooked."

The broker reflected diligently.

"Haven't seen him today, have you? I mean this Waring man."

"No, I haven't."

"Or yesterday?"

"No; not for nearly a week."

Harmon sat back, and massaged his forehead absent-mindedly.

"Well — has this made much difference to you?"

"How could it help it?" Hilliard grimaced. "This isn't New York City, or a deaf and dumb asylum. News doesn't have to travel fast to make the rounds. Everybody who's ever heard my name knows it by this time."

Harmon leaned forward on his elbows, and drew a quick, nervous breath. His eyes, now slightly dilated, sought for Hilliard's, found them, darted away again.

"That's tough . . . mighty tough. . . . I . . . I came up here thinking I might do something about it. Save the situation, you know. Too late, is it?"

"A good deal too late."

Harmon exhaled lengthily, and fumbled for his invariable cigarette; Hilliard observed, without particular deduction, that his hands lacked certainty.

"That does sort of burst the bubble, doesn't it? Well . . . I suppose the next step you want to take is to get out of town."

"No," said Hilliard, "I'll stay till it's over with."

Harmon gasped.

"Stay? Stay here after the news is out? What *for?*"

"I hardly think you'd understand what I'm staying for, Mr. Harmon."

The fat broker shook his head in vigorous protest.

"Now, look here!" His voice was paternally kind. "You've been a fine sport through this whole business, except once, and we won't let that bother us now. As a salesman, you've been a holy wonder. You've done all I ever expected you'd do, or *could* do, and then some. And your flare-up last time I was here don't hurt you with me one little bit. But here we are at the finish. The game's played out, and there's no use hanging around the table to watch the waiters clean up. My suggestion to you is to pack your duds, and get out. Call it a day, and quit. There's better business somewhere else. And if you'd like to plant yourself in some other good town, say, Detroit, and —"

"No, thanks." Hilliard's smile was out of genuine humour.

"Well, aren't you open to conviction?"

"No, I don't think I am. Please don't argue — that's final."

Harmon lighted the cigarette, and studied the first cloud of smoke attentively.

"Well, you're sure you can't do any more here, aren't you?"

"Not a nickel's worth — even if I wanted to. And would you mind getting down to brass tacks? Otherwise, I can't see any benefit to either of us from prolonging this interview; can you?"

Harmon inspected him carefully; and seemed to be struck with an inspiration.

"I'm not sure of it at that — look here now! I've got an idea! Let's try to get some benefit out of it. Suppose you got clear of this mess. Suppose we straighten it out from top to bottom. Everybody satisfied. Suppose you got out of it absolutely clean; do you think you could take your experience and your front and your energy, and cash in on some better business?"

Hilliard exclaimed aloud; he could hardly credit his ears.

"What's that?" he managed. "I don't understand!"

The broker's eyes brightened. "It's easy enough if you put your mind to it. I've told you before," he said impressively, "I'm out for results. That's my middle name — R-E-sults. And not results from minute to minute, but results in the long run. Now it does seem to me like an awful shame to have you come up here, and spend all this time and money flub-dubbing around, and then have it all over with, and nothing to show for it but a lot of belly-aching customers. Of course we've made a little money, but when we let this scheme wind up in a big howl from everybody we've got into it, we're losing the cumulative value of *you*. And it's you that was the backbone of the whole

idea. Now — this is only a passing thought, but let's consider it — which way would be the best for us in the long run, to close up this deal and get out from under, and take a little profit and be in dutch here for ever, or to be a couple of philanthropists and play strong for the future?"

"How do you *mean?*" Hilliard was afire with hope.

The broker's smile was every moment more broadly ingratiating.

"Why, suppose I should hand you back every cent you've collected and paid in. This is just a suggestion — I want your opinion on it. You go 'round to your subscribers; tell 'em the mine isn't as promising as you thought it was; you're going to make good; give 'em their money back. *Now* — if you did that, and left a first-class impression everywhere, could you start from scratch all over again, and sell enough honest-to-goodness conservative stuff — municipals, or like that — to those same people to make up the difference?" He was studying his companion keenly.

Hilliard's eyes blazed; the audacity of the suggestion was obscured by the possibility of honour that it contained. "*Yes!*" he said thickly. "*Yes!* You bet I could!"

"And you wouldn't be afraid to keep on working for me? That is, if we got this Silverbow scheme all laundered clean before we started something else?"

"Not if you —"

"Then listen!" The broker's voice was soft and homiletical. "You've thought some hard things about me. Maybe you had some cause; I'm not disputing that. But I guess you've forgotten something. Something I told you when we first got together. I

told you if you got me what I wanted, I'd help you get what you want. Well — you've done your best. I got to give you credit. And maybe you've changed some of my ideas, too. Maybe you've sort of worked me around to believing I haven't given you a square deal. Well — let the past bury its dead. I've got more than one string to my bow; I'm sort of tired of the old line of stuff; I'm thinking seriously of cutting it all out, and going in for the safe and sane. It isn't so juicy, but it's safe. Am I right or am I wrong? All the cards on the table — I'm no fool, Hilliard — and the bottom's falling out of the promotion game. So if you think you can blossom out into a legitimate salesman of high-grade bonds — of course there wouldn't be nearly as much in it for *you* — I've got more than half a mind to give you the chance. It's a risk, but I guess I owe it to you." He slid his pudgy hand across the table, and smiled pacifically. "I've taken a strong fancy to you, son — let's be respectable together. What do you say to that?"

In his feverish joy, Hilliard was willing to ignore the obvious fact that the broker's repentance was considerably overdue, and that it was founded on expediency and not on principle. And he wasn't thinking so much of his own exculpation, or of his own potential fortune, as he was of the protection to Cullen, and to Cullen's friends. The thought of working longer for Harmon — even if the securities he had to sell in future were most conservative — filled him with nausea; but if that were the only way to save the situation, how could Hilliard decline? How, in view of his late morality, could he put his own tastes above the security of his trusting clients? How, in his duty to himself, could

he refuse to work again for Harmon, if this were the only means to save his friends their money already lost? He felt his veins throbbing to his agitation.

"Is . . . is that a *bona-fide* offer?" he faltered.

Harmon's hand slapped the table for emphasis.

"Straight as a string. To tell the truth, you're sort of on my conscience. You're with me? All *right!* Then as far as I'm concerned, the contract's cancelled here and now. There's no use shadow-boxing when the main bout's finished. Got it with you?"

"No, I —"

The broker's face darkened. "Where is it?"

Hilliard was disinclined to tell how and why he had entrusted it to Cullen. "It's safe," he said. He could hardly contain himself; he looked and looked at Harmon, trying faithfully to reconcile the man and his appearance and his principles, and he failed — but here was the great reality confronting him — and the millionth chance had magically come true. It was warped honesty, but it was honesty no less.

Harmon licked his lips.

"Well, we'll clean up the whole transaction today, and start with a new deal. That's settled. Oh, don't carry on like that, Hilliard.— Now about this chap Waring —"

"Oh, you still want to see him, do you?"

Harmon hesitated. "Sure! Give him a little surprise, eh? If he's the man who's been bombarding us, we'll spike his guns first.— What?" He laughed noisily, and Hilliard was almost too excited to dislike the laugh. "Don't bother to telephone the Onondaga; we'll just walk over."

"But I thought you wanted to stay away from

there?" Hilliard was displaying many of the symptoms of intoxication.

"Oh, not when everything's going along so smooth and nice! We can go up in your room, and have Waring up there, and be just as private as anywhere else."

Accordingly, and to the chagrin of a hovering waiter, they quitted their booth and went out to the open air. They reached the Onondaga; they arrived at the mezzanine floor; they were safe in Hilliard's apartment.

"My!" said Harmon jocosely. "I wish *I* could afford to live like this! But you've got a rich backer, and I haven't." He rubbed his hands in great good-nature; his eyes were sparkling, and his fat body was aquiver with vitality. "Well, the first thing to do. . . . Where did you say you keep that contract of ours hidden?"

"Is there any hurry about that now?" Hilliard was fairly beside himself with joy.

"*Well* —" The sudden whirr of the telephone buzzer seemed to ruffle the broker's nerves; for he started violently. "Who's that?"

"Just a moment. . . ." Hilliard took down the receiver. "Yes? . . . Oh, yes, have him . . . no; hold the wire —" He beckoned hilariously to Harmon. "Waring's downstairs now! You're ready to see him, aren't you?"

The broker was suddenly plunged into uncertainty.

"Yes — no! *No!*"

"What's wrong?" Hilliard was visited by an unwelcome chill; he tried to analyse it, and couldn't.

The big man was breathing with difficulty. "I . . .

you go down and . . . no, that wouldn't do, either. . . . I want to see him alone. I want to get him to call off his investigator, so when we begin a new campaign we won't have any verified report against us on the old —"

"No, sir!" Hilliard shook his head smilingly. "I'm the man who's had to stand the gaff so far; I'm going to be in on any conferences. That's *my* pay!"

Harmon licked his lips again, and swallowed repeatedly.

"Well . . . it's . . . if you let me do the talking, then . . . or . . ."

Hilliard turned back to the transmitter.

"Ask him to come right up," he said. He replaced the instrument, and looked alarmedly at the broker. "You're not well!"

"Yes, I am . . . now let's get at that contract! There's no sense talking new business until that's cancelled, is there?"

As Hilliard stared at him, an icy wave of suspicion swept him from head to foot.

"What's your hurry? It's my funeral, isn't it?"

"There isn't any hurry, but —"

"You *are* anxious, though! Harmon, I —"

"No . . . no hurry at all. Only as long as I'm here . . . and the game's played out . . . as a favour to me . . . let's cancel it. Where is it? I . . . Good God, son, don't you *want* that thing out of the way? It's no good with an *alias* on it! I'll put up the money — I —"

A sharp rap on the door stopped him short. Hilliard turned the knob; Waring and Mr. Cullen burst in.

"Why, Mr. Cullen!" he said in astonishment.

"They didn't tell me you were here! Hello, Rufus."

"Hilliard!" Cullen's face was red and excited. "Oh, I beg your pardon!" He had seen Harmon.

Hilliard, taken utterly by surprise, began to phrase the introductions; he had only just begun when Harmon interrupted — Harmon with a set jaw and blazing cheeks. He was standing by the writing table, and one hand was resting heavily upon it. His manner was curiously apprehensive, curiously desperate.

"Ah! . . . Mr. Cullen . . . most happy, I'm sure . . . and Mr. Waring . . . delighted!" His voice was silken in its throatiness. "Gentlemen, I have the honour to be president . . . of the Silverbow Mining Corporation . . ." He paused; his hands weaved aimlessly. "Of Montana. . . . Gentlemen. . . . I hear there's been some adverse criticism of our property . . . you're stockholders, I understand . . . not used to criticism . . ." He flung his head erect. "*I offer you* personally . . . to relieve you . . . of any and all obligations . . . and pay back penny for penny." Here his knees shook, and he swayed appreciably. He was holding himself upright only by tremendous, visible effort.

"The man's sick!" Cullen stepped towards him. Waring and Hilliard were standing fascinated. The broker warded off Cullen with both hands.

"No, I'm not sick! . . . Contract calls for delivery of ninety-nine percent of capital stock . . . on payment of a hundred and twenty thousand dollars . . . before December first. . . . You've paid sixty-two . . . I'm here . . . case of dissatisfaction . . . to write checks for the full amount paid down to date . . . I *release* you . . ."

"*Release* us?" Cullen all but yelled it, and with a note of exultation which was electrical to Hilliard.

"Release you . . . get a notary . . ." He sat down limply. "My check-book, Hilliard — for Christ's sake, get me my . . . check-book!" All at once he seemed to collapse; his head hung low, and his breathing became stertorous. His cheeks puffed queerly.

Hilliard sprang to him. "Rufus! Call the office! Get the house doctor!"

Cullen had raced to the bath-room for a glass of water; he raced back again, spilling half of it. Hilliard was chafing the broker's wrists. "Pulse like a trip-hammer!" he said, distracted. "He ought to be lying down! Help me with him!" The three men strained at the unwieldy, unresisting bulk, while leaden fear clutched at their hearts.

The house physician bustled in to find the broker lying on the bed in a profound coma; his reflexes had gone from him; he couldn't be roused. There was no need of a stethoscope.

"Order an ice bag," said the man of medicine sharply. He himself was rattling among his vials for the calomel. Rufus was at the telephone.

"Anything I can do?" asked Hilliard earnestly. His suspicions had crystallized; and he was bitterly aware that the broker had planned not justice, but some new brand of perfidy; nevertheless, the man was unquestionably in danger — and revenge could wait.

"Nothing — just give me plenty of room."

As the three stood watching painfully, Cullen put out his hand to Hilliard, and spoke under his breath.

"Henry — when did he come?"

"Only just now. An hour ago."

"Hadn't he *told* you? Or hadn't you *heard?*"

"Heard what?"

Cullen motioned to Waring.

"Give it to him, Rufus . . . oh, I *see;* I *see* —"

The law student, without a word, produced a yellow blank, and thrust it at Hilliard. He flashed a glance of indescribable contempt at the supine broker; his eyes had lost some of their anxiety.

"Oh, the big crook!" he said, boyishly. "The big crook!"

"Sh-h-h! Rufus!" Still, Hilliard, at heart, agreed with him to the letter.

The boy stood close to the masquerader.

"I'm sorry, Hilliard . . . it came at four this afternoon . . . we'd been hunting for you ever since . . ."

Hilliard wasn't interested.

"I'll wait until —"

Cullen signed to him peremptorily.

"No! Read it *now!*"

"But, Mr. Cullen —"

"Read it, I tell you! . . . It'll give you a slant on him!"

Hilliard peered over the foot of the bed; Harmon was still lying inert. The physician nodded sidewise.

"Nothing for *you* to do," he said grimly; and Hilliard, only partly aware of what he was doing, gave heed to the yellow blank.

The fourth telegram of the day was from Butte, Montana, addressed to Waring.

ARRIVED HERE LAST NIGHT AFTER DELAY IN CHICAGO THIS MORNINGS PAPERS CONTAIN

INFORMATION AS FOLLOWS THE FAULTED VEIN ON XLNC PROPERTY ADJOINING SILVERBOW CLAIM NUMBER ONE HAS BEEN LOCATED ABOUT TWENTY FEET FROM SILVERBOW BOUNDARY INDICATIONS ARE ORE BODY RUNNING AT LEAST EIGHT PERCENT AVERAGE AND SOME PLACES HIGH AS TWENTY ALSO SOME ZINC AND SILVER AND TRACES OF MANGANESE THIS EVIDENTLY EXTENDS WELL INTO SILVERBOW WHERE GREATEST VALUES ARE UNDOUBTEDLY LYING AND JUDGING FROM RECORDS OF OLD XLNC VEIN ITS A TREMENDOUSLY BIG STRIKE UNDERSTAND XLNC OWNERS OFFERING LARGE SUM SAID TO BE WELL OVER HALF MILLION FOR A CONTROLLING INTEREST I STRONGLY ADVISE ALL OF YOU TO GET ABOARD FOR AS MUCH AS HILLARD WILL LET GO AM SENDING THIS FROM OFFICE OF COOLEY BENJAMIN AND RUSSELL WHO WILL NOT SEND SEPARATE REPORT UNLESS YOU WANT IT THIS IS WONDERFUL NEWS AND MINE IS SURE WINNER EVEN IF ONLY A FRACTION AS LARGE AS REPORTED PLEASE SHOW THIS MESSAGE TO HILLIARD SIG J J ARMSTRONG

Hilliard sat down in the nearest chair. The lump in his throat was choking him; the moment was so big that his feelings were primitive; his expression of them very simple. He only smiled; the meaningless, vacuous smile of an infant. That smile embraced the entire universe; it was indicative of a happiness so limitless, so perfect, that it was almost foolish. So Harmon, knowing from his own sources of the sudden strike, had rushed to Syracuse to pose as a man of honour! So Harmon had wanted to meet Waring —

and find if Waring had yet heard the news, and, if he hadn't, stop the investigation by apparent frankness and ready restitution. So Harmon had been eager to destroy the contract, to promise Hilliard anything and everything to repay the money that was subscribed already — and then, as sole owner, to take an enormous profit for himself.

No one in the whole world — and least of all, Waring and Cullen — could have remotely fathomed the thoughts that were eddying in Hilliard's brain. They were not for his own aggrandizement; they were for the Cullens and Durants and for the others who need never know the acid of disillusionment. They were for the ideals he had struggled towards; they were for the friends who had stood by him. And there was one very especial and very manly thought for Jack Armstrong, who had been so courageous in his defeat, and so neutral in his behaviour afterwards, and who now had sent the generous news winging eastward, with the request that Hilliard should learn at once of his vindication.

And as Hilliard sat there, smiling out into the silent room, and struggling to visualize the extent of fortune which had so abruptly smitten him, there was a dry murmur from the bed where Harmon lay, and a resulting silence so pregnant with meaning that the smile faded, and Hilliard was on his feet, open-eyed with the present horror brought back to him.

The physician was rising slowly from cramped knees.

"It's all over," he said; paused, and added: "Apoplexy."

The only man in all America who could have testified to Hilliard's simulation had ceased to breathe.

XXIII

AS Dr. Durant, having already given counsel this morning to seven patients, appeared at the door of the ante-room to signal to the eighth, he was palpably astonished at the presence of the young man who sat next to the door. The Doctor was very human; the Doctor was very adaptable; but for thirty years he had managed to keep the social and professional phases of his life entirely apart, and at the very first glance he was aware that Hilliard hadn't come to consult with him professionally. Nevertheless, he raised his finger in the usual sign; Hilliard followed him to the inner room.

It was Hilliard's introduction to the Doctor's morning manner; and even in his own exalted spirit, he yielded slightly to the restraint in the atmosphere. The Doctor was bland, smiling, approachable, and yet not at all the same man as he appeared at the house on James Street. The husk was the same but the kernel was different. He seemed detached from the hampering littlenesses of a household; there was no air of intentional repose about him. Hilliard, in spite of the importance of his mission, felt apologetic; he felt as though he were unwittingly robbing science of its most valuable asset, which is Time.

"I know this isn't exactly the proper thing to do," he said, "but I'm leaving town in an hour or so . . . I thought you might spare me five minutes, Doctor, even if it *is* a little irregular. Can you?"

"What seems to be the trouble?" The Doctor's tone was a mild invitation to squander nothing on preliminaries.

"Mr. Cullen and I are running down to New York today. . . . You've seen the morning papers, haven't you?"

"Yes." The Doctor nodded. "And Cullen telephoned me last night. Was Mr. . . . what was his name: Harmon? . . . was he a close friend of yours, Hilliard?"

"No; just a business associate . . . I didn't know him very well personally — socially, I should say. But it changes some of my plans . . . Mr. Cullen and I have to go to New York for a few days and after that we're going out to Montana together."

The Doctor tapped his desk thoughtfully.

"On account of this?"

"Partly, and partly not. The whole perspective's changed; we've got to get to work. Now, the last time I saw you . . . why, that was only yesterday!" He broke off, laughing at himself. "It seems so much longer ago than that! Why, you said then that if I ever needed any one of several different things, including seventy-five hundred dollars, to come to you. And you spoke as though you really meant it, Doctor. . . . So I've come!"

The Doctor regarded him steadily for a moment, and resumed tapping the glass pad on his desk with a meditative forefinger.

"You've reconsidered, have you?"

"Not that so much — but we've had fresh information. Jack Armstrong's out there, indirectly representing Mr. Cullen, and we've heard from our own

lawyers besides. So on the whole, I'm willing to let you in if you're willing to come, in spite of what I said at lunch yesterday."

The Doctor hesitated.

"Not that I doubt you at all," he said, "but when Cullen telephoned me last night, he said that you and he had raised all the money you needed in half an hour after you went out to look for it. You see, I have some channels of information myself! So I can't help wondering why you need this now." Nevertheless, he was hunting for his check-book.

"We *don't* need it — I simply insisted on keeping a place open for you, on the chance that you hadn't changed your mind."

"You're fully satisfied it's the right thing for me to do?"

"Yes, Doctor, I am."

The Doctor held his pen poised in the air. "Then I'm not sure I'm really entitled to it. Doesn't it really belong to some one who was on the spot last night?"

Hilliard's eyes twinkled.

"You're fond of talking about motives, Doctor. . . . You'd have let me have that money yesterday, wouldn't you?"

"Didn't I offer it to you?"

"Yes, sir; you did. But was it because you thought you'd make a big profit, or was it just to help me?"

"Why —"

"You see," said Hilliard cheerily, "if you're going to have these mercenary motives, you've got to let me have some, too. I've let friendship interfere with business twice in two days. And you're not the only

one I held a place open for — Rufus and Jack are in it, too. It was my privilege to make that condition — and I did."

The Doctor scribbled rapidly.

"Then I'll keep my promise. . . . But would you mind telling me what it is I'm buying?"

"Here's your receipt, Doctor." Hilliard laid a slip of paper on the desk; took up the check, and scrutinized it carefully. "What you've bought," he said, "is a twentieth interest in a new syndicate formed last night. We'll assume the stock control in New York, when we get there, by paying in some more cash (and we've got more than we need already) and after that, we may possibly sell out, or we may go ahead and develop the mine ourselves. I don't know yet which; that's what Mr. Cullen and I are going West to decide. But you'll be protected anyhow; I'll see to that. And if you're in any hurry to get your money back —"

"How soon do you think it'll be?"

Hilliard laughed outright; a laugh of utter happiness. "Right now, if you say so."

The Doctor puzzled.

"You don't make it clear," he said.

"Then I will. Mr. Embree, down at the Trust and Deposit Company, was one of the men who wanted to get in with us, and couldn't. He was just too late. But when I told him what I was saving out for you, he authorized me to make you an offer. I'm acting as his agent, that is, and I've got his check here, and if you want to endorse that receipt over to him, you can have this." He presented the banker's check; the Doctor started; it was payable to himself, signed by Embree, and written for fifteen thousand dollars.

"Why, Hilliard!" he said, blankly. "Is that good business? For Embree? What's behind this?"

Hilliard fairly beamed his delight. "Well, if you want my advice, don't take it! I told him I'd have to explain it to you, and he agreed." He sat straighter, pridefully. "Jack Armstrong sent another wire this morning — and the XLNC crowd, who own the property next to ours, know that I've had this contract for all the Silverbow stock, and they've made us a flat proposition of "— he caught his breath —"*four — hundred — thousand dollars* for the contract! And your twentieth share would be worth *twenty* thousand dollars if we took it! But we're not going to — because it's worth still more, and we know it. Lots more — *twice* as much — so —"

The Doctor's expression altered slightly; his chin sank a little, and he sighed, almost in regret.

"That hardly seems fair," he said slowly. "That hardly seems fair." He smiled fitfully, and sighed again. "For years and years," he said, "ever since I first began to practise, I've been working and waiting and hoping to reach the point where I could give up office-work, and do some research. . . . And here, in a few minutes, you dangle a two years' income in front of me — for no services of mine at all . . . for no labour on my part . . . not, as I'd hoped, the result of service, but —"

"I own a quarter of the mine myself," said Hilliard, with equal gravity. "And I'm not thinking how I got it, Doctor; I'm thinking how much good I can do with it . . . can't you look at it that way, too?"

The Doctor nodded presently.

"I suppose that has to be the answer. Well —"

"I'll tell Embree you didn't accept." Hilliard reached for his hat. "And I mustn't bother you any more this morning; we've both too much to do. I only wanted to see you a moment, and tell you the news, and get your check. But when Cullen and I come back —" His smile was glorious.

They were shaking hands at the door of the anteroom.

"That'll be before the holidays, won't it? We expect you to take Christmas dinner with us, of course. Mrs. Durant and Carol would never forgive you if you didn't — and neither would I."

Hilliard flushed with pleasure.

"Nothing would please me better . . . and you'll tell Mrs. Durant and Carol how grateful I am . . . and how sorry I am I can't even stop now to say good-bye, won't you?" As a matter of fact, he wasn't going to stop because he knew that if he did, he might never get to Montana. And there was need of quick action against Harmon's cut-throat partners in New York.

"Surely I will. And I'll also tell them what an altruist you are. I still don't feel exactly right about it,— but the world's the world. . . . And I'm not going to refuse an investment just because there happens to be money in it! Good-bye! Good luck, my boy!"

XXIV

ALREADY at daybreak it was a white Christmas; white underfoot, white overhead, dancing, swirling white of snow in the winter air. Hilliard, lifting himself on his elbow to watch it from the car window, was unreservedly thrilled by the appropriateness of it. Nature, which had been sulking for a week or more, had finally consented to dress the season. But the thrill dissolved, and anxiety took its place when he discovered that it was past eight o'clock, and this was only Buffalo! His watch, and the railway folder, gave him indigestible food for thought, and the snow, taking upon itself the rôle of a barrier to traffic, was suddenly less agreeable to look at. Wreaths in the windows of nearby houses, holly berries and red ribbon, glimpses of feathery fir boughs and tinsel through the curtains — all these awoke within him a new and a disturbing fancy that at the end of two thousand miles of visioning he might be irretrievably late! Illogically he made haste to rise; he wanted to flavour his impatience by counting landmarks.

The diner was half filled when he arrived for breakfast; and the train was still standing in the yards. As the conductor wished him a perfunctory Merry Christmas, Hilliard smiled obliquely.

"Not unless you make up some speed between here and Syracuse," he said.

"Not much chance of that," said the conductor, punching the order slip. "It's deep snow from here

on, sir. Lucky if we're in in time for your turkey!"

Hilliard sighed, brightened as the train dragged itself into sluggish motion, and gave his attention to the landscape. It was typically a scene from a Christmas card; all it needed, at any moment, was a few lines of engraving in the foreground to be a very fair counterpart of the cards which Hilliard had ordered sent out from Billy Foote's to all his friends. He mentally reviewed the list; as soon as he had realized how long the western business would detain him, he had written to Foote's, and forwarded a model card, and fifty town addresses. He smiled again, expansively, at the conception of what the name of Hilliard on those cards now meant to Syracuse. Communities are always fiddling with the telescope of esteem — looking at success through the big lens, and failure through the small one, and exaggerating the facts. They were undoubtedly magnifying his grandeur now; he knew enough of human nature to realize that in his home-coming he was certain to be greeted as a multi-millionaire. And it wasn't multi — it was only the possibility of a single one!

The thought of riches turned his mind to the individuals who would share in them; Dr. Durant, who, unless he chose, need never keep office hours again — he could devote himself to the research he loved; Cullen, whose blind, bulldog faith had made him for ever independent, even Rufus Waring, whose modest contribution, accepted out of spleenless commiseration, had swelled to the dignity of four figures, and given him the means to show the world to Angela. And Hilliard himself had made far more than all the other venturers combined . . . not in money, perhaps, but in dividends payable in the medium of his self-respect.

And yet, as the realities stood, now, he was sensitive to the nothingness of his triumph, until such time as he had some one to divide it with him. For there is little pleasure in a monopoly of happiness; not even a joke is fully established until some one appears to share it; a secret is delectable only when it's repeated, a conquest is empty without the popular acclaim, or the arrival of the historian. He felt this keenly; he reflected that of all the syndicate, he alone was without a beneficiary. And today, when he had steeled himself to speak to Carol . . . Like countless generations of men before him, he began vaguely to wonder what he should do if she refused him.

What would be left? Only the shell of achievement. Would he go back to France? or would he remain in America, and struggle for success by endowing war charities out of his glorious income-to-be? Also . . . and this was enervating . . . what should he say to her? It is given to few men to propose twice, in different characters, to the same girl.

The train ploughed and panted through the thickening drifts; Hilliard's watch was coming out of his pocket at five-minute intervals; here was Rochester at last . . . three hours late . . . and there, shining dimly through banked clouds, was the sun! The train seemed warmed to greater effort by its mere appearance; Hilliard, who had measured time by weeks, then by days, and more recently by reluctant hours, began to mark the minutes from his mental calendar.

And then after an interminable century of impatience, the outlying villages, grey and smoky; the flat wastes of Solvay; the roads slowly becoming streets; the buildings adding height . . . Syracuse!

His feet were on the platform; he was hurrying forward. Ahead of him . . . and in his excitability he stumbled heavily . . . there, coming toward him . . . Carol and the Doctor, befurred and rosy . . . no question of the welcome they were bringing him!

His own initial remarks were grossly incoherent. There were no words to fit the situation; perhaps he did it greater justice by the disconnected sounds he made. And then he was entering the Doctor's closed car; they were bouncing over the cobbles of the lower city; they were attacking the grade of James Street, and he was peering out in an ecstasy of memory at the houses where he had played in boyhood.

Two o'clock . . . on time for dinner to the second! A house hanging with evergreens; a Christmas spirit permeating every nook and cranny; Christmas odours — not all of evergreen — drifting in tantalizing whiffs to meet him.

A joyous interlude; a gay procession; a hush; a gravely spoken blessing — Oh, that Christmas!

There came a time, early in the evening, when Hilliard found himself alone with Carol. He had a vague recollection that they had been sent to look for something . . . a corn popper, or some other equally futile article . . . and for an instant, he marvelled at their expecting to find it in the sun-parlour, where they had wandered. But the sun-parlour was happily unoccupied; and there were comfortable chairs in it; and something very green and red and seasonable in all the windows; so that they both delayed prodigiously, and exchanged a number of highly inconsequential remarks about the decorations. Presently, without so much as a

transient thought for the corn-popper, they sat down with one accord. From a distance, the murmur of cheerful voices in the living room was an adequate accompaniment to their thoughts.

Hilliard's head was dropped low; his revery was so profound, that not even Carol's voice could rouse him — not until she spoke a second time.

"I *said* — a penny for them," she repeated, amused.

"Oh!" Hilliard's awakening was explosive. "Why, that's queer . . . I was just thinking about that myself! I mean the first Sunday I ever came up here to dinner. You said the same thing then. Remember it?"

"Yes, indeed . . . and they were a wonderful bargain at the price!" He didn't seem to recall that she had ever looked so mischievous.

"They are now, then," he said. "Because it's just as it was before — I was thinking about you." Regarding her, he was transported anew by her loveliness. And it wasn't only her external loveliness that he adored, it was what she had of sympathy, and kindness, and sweetness of disposition. A very womanly girl she was . . . not a flaming character to blaze and die, but a steady and enduring soul . . . such as he craved . . .

She turned her head away.

"I was very angry at you this morning," she said; "I thought you'd forgotten about me entirely."

Hilliard affected alarm. "How could that happen?"

"Not even so much as a little card with 'Merry Christmas' on it," she said. "Father and mother had one from you, but as for me —" She opened her hands in emptiness. "I looked over every one of them twice."

Hilliard felt his pulses quicken.

"Doesn't my coming to you make up a little for it?"

"No, I'm afraid it doesn't,— not in that way. I'm still very childish about Christmas. I have to *see* it — even if it's only in the tiniest little remembrances. I'm very much hurt. I've been telling myself it must be the postman's fault."

He denied it bravely. "It wasn't the postman's — it was mine. Because I didn't intend to send you a remembrance at all — I intended to bring it. I planned to give it to you before dinner, but when I was so late, and everybody was waiting —"

She turned with gratifying quickness.

"Did you bring it?"

"Yes," he said, "I brought it. I'm not quite sure whether you'll like it or not —"

"I'll like anything you brought!" The pronoun had an infinitesimal emphasis all to itself.

Hilliard cleared his throat.

"When I was young —"

"I beg your pardon?"

He laughed at high pressure and began over again.

"When I was young, Mother Grundy had a very small selection to choose from — books and candy and flowers. If I'd sent you anything by mail, I think I'd have had to obey the rules. My early training was pretty severe. But I thought if I brought it myself, perhaps I could be more original."

"How original?" she asked, with pretty animation.

His heart was pounding relentlessly; he had lost the elaborate recital which he carefully prepared; and it was gone without a trace. He had to depend on presence of mind.

"Since I couldn't keep to my schedule, I've been saving it up to give you when everything was propitious." He tendered her a package, tied with holly ribbon; it was smaller than a book, and smaller than any orthodox carrier of confection. "Don't open it just yet, please . . ."

She looked at it, pinched it, dropped it in her lap, and laughed softly.

"Is there such a mystery about it?"

"Yes, there is." Hilliard felt himself begin to go with the current of his mood. He sat up awkwardly. "All that you could ever think of asking about me . . . where I've been and what I've done . . . is in that box. It's everything . . . a biography, and a history . . . and it's my gift to you, too. But before you open it . . ." He had to pause to collect himself. "I'll have to make an explanation." He fought with it, and found his lips strangely sealed.

"Is it so very hard to make?" she asked at length.

"Almost impossible . . ." He was seeing black and red. Even if "everybody" had expected him to do this thing (as Angela had long since assured him) what reason did he have to hope for pardon? "What would you think," he asked, perilously, "of a man who cared enough about you to risk everything he had in the world . . . not his valuables in the sense of money . . . but all his ambitions for everything: all his dreams; all his ideals; all his hopes . . . on a Christmas gift? What would you?"

She frowned adorably.

"And . . . he's not just a little bit quixotic?"

"Not at all . . . suppose he did it deliberately, and

after a great deal of thought. Just on the chance that it might please you? When it would *either* do that — or end our friendship? "

She fingered the small package over and over.

" Why, I should think that if this . . . mythical person were so very anxious to please me, he wouldn't take quite so much risk."

" But when I'm the mythical person myself — that's different, isn't it? "

" Why should it be? " She gave him no opportunity to see her face.

" You've forgotten a great deal. I told you once that if you knew all that I've been . . . all that I've done . . . you might not be so willing to have my friendship, anyway."

" No," she said, subdued. " I've not forgotten, but you have! I said that I didn't believe you."

" You're holding it all in your hands," said Hilliard. His expression, as he gazed at her, was infinitely yearning; but his voice was even and low. " I spent a good many hours over this . . . wondering whether it was right for me to take such a risk on this day, above all others . . . and finally, I thought it out this way; if it pleases you, it ought to make the day better yet . . . if it doesn't, it would have been just as unwelcome to you at any other time. Understand, I'll never attempt to excuse anything . . . we're beyond that. All I can do is to wait. I'm giving you . . . will you open it now, please? "

Her fingers bungled with the knot, and he made as though to help her.

" No," she said, holding the package away from him. " I want to open it all myself! "

Hilliard, rigid, watched her. A phrase was beating heavily against his consciousness . . . one of the Proverbs . . . something about the bread of deceit, and ashes . . .

The knot gave way; and the tissue wrapping, falling aside, disclosed an oblong pasteboard box. Carol lifted the lid and Hilliard caught his breath. There were two cabinet photographs; uppermost was a very excellent likeness of Hilliard himself. She looked at him perplexedly; he was getting out his fountain pen. His hand was cold, unsteady.

"It lacks something, doesn't it?" he said, in an undertone. "Let me have it a moment." While she followed his every movement, he wrote, with his left hand and somewhat painstakingly, an inscription; and gave back the picture.

"'Christmas, 1916,' she read, "'with love from Henry Hilliard.'" She flushed hotly.

"*Now* look!" he said, ignoring her reaction. "The . . . the next one." Mechanically she took out the second photograph; it was a duplicate of the picture of Dicky Morgan on the Doctor's desk. Her cheeks were suddenly devoid of colour, she stared fearfully at him without speaking.

"That lacks something, too," he said; and his voice was yielding to the tremendous strain upon him. With conspicuous care he shifted the pen to his right hand; held it poised for a moment, gave her a smile of ineffable pathos, closed his teeth hard. "I have a very useful little trait," he said; "I'm ambidextrous." And wrote his message.

She had the evidence before her — the inimitable, unmistakable, ornamental script of another personality.

"Christmas, 1916 — and love from Dick to Carol."

"The real gift is underneath," he said, and his diction now was foreign even to himself. "But . . . no, no, go on . . ."

Her uncertain, exploring fingers had touched a smaller box; it sprang open in her palm; within, was a gorgeously flashing, scintillating, living gem, set in platinum. Her hands, unsteady now as were his own, closed over it as though to guard and shelter it. Her eyes sought his, and held them — fright was meeting fright.

"And in my thought," he said, "are all the sweet memories I have of you . . . and all the fragrance of you . . . and in the stone there . . . there's a story for you to read . . . bigger than any book could hold . . ." She still made no answer; she was holding her three gifts tightly, and staring at him, staring . . . not in the revulsion he had imagined, not in the measureless contempt he had feared, but with the wraith of a smile trembling on her pale lips. "Only one of the photographs is to keep," he said thickly. "One of the two . . . I'm giving you the chance to say which it is . . . which one of the two you want to live . . . if you want either of those men to go on loving you . . . or if you want them both to go away — for always!"

In her eyes, there was another miracle: her eyes were soft, and indicative of a great relief, rather than of a great shock: and as he watched, spellbound, he saw that tears were creeping into them, and not of sorrow but of great joy. In that moment his most stupefying discovery was made, and the magnitude of it, the portent of it, set his brain at naught, and left him destitute of reason.

"Carol!" he said, petrified. "*Carol!*"

Mute, she shook her head. Looking him full in the eyes, she flinched suddenly, and a great sob burst in her throat. The photograph of Dicky Morgan was in her hand; she held it a moment, trembling, and then, while her breath came faster and her shoulders quivered, she tore it across and across, finer and finer, until only fragmentary scraps remained — and these she let fall in her lap, unheeded. The likeness of Hilliard,— the lying, radiant face of the man nobody knew — this she had seized, and this she had clutched to her breast, spasmodically, as though in fear to have it snatched away from her.

Hilliard was very close to her; and his whole being was concentrated in his eyes.

"Carol!" he said to her again in that stranger's voice. "Carol . . . You . . . you *knew!*"

Tardily, unwillingly, she raised her head.

"From the very first day," she said brokenly. "Both Dad and I . . . and no one else; not even Mother . . . your eyes told us both, and we've trusted you so . . . and waited so surely . . . we *knew* it would come out all right in the end, somehow . . . and . . . and . . . I *do* like my gift! It does make the day better . . . Henry!"

She had called him "Henry" and even in the spell of his confusion, he throbbed to the significance of it.

The lover was eager, but the prodigal was startled back from the very threshold of love.

"From the first day!" he breathed, electrified. "And you trusted me like that . . . when you knew what I was doing —"

She was laughing and crying at the same time; his

hungry arms went out to her and found her; words were coming tumultuously to him and he said them as they came. Somehow the ring was on her finger; and she had kissed it there. Between them, partnered, a sacred understanding as imperishable as bronze had arisen; they both knew, without the necessity of prolonged speech, what his future was to be. They both knew in what capacity he was to face the world; they both knew the brimming fulness of her pardon and the brimming fulness of his regret. These truths were mutually confirmed; the shabby past was indistinguishably merged with the fresh and vivid present; their pledges to this end were upon their lips. The world was lying helpless at their feet . . . the wonderful, sensitive, receptive world which had respected and honoured and admired him in the days of his regeneration, and would continue, paying the reward of his conquest.

In an irresistible passion of humility and shame and courage, he tried to tell her the sums of his deceits; her lips prevented him.

"You mustn't!" she murmured. "Never! You let me choose — I want it this way."

Dazed, triumphant, he was re-living bygone incidents, seeing faint clues develop into mighty revelations, comprehending at last the supreme love and supreme faith of the two who had waited for his victory, and kept his secret shut within their hearts, that he might stand the ordeal, and prove triumphant. And now, the reputation that was already his . . . the loftier reputation which he should consecrate himself to build . . . not only for the pleasure of the building, but also because there were those to whom he owed it . .

Behind them, a firm footfall. Hilliard was on his feet, his arm instinctively protecting Carol. Dr. Durant was smiling on them from the doorway . . . grave, benevolent, paternal. He, too, became a common partner to the understanding; an interchange of glances was sufficient. He came in swiftly; his hands outstretched, his head lifted high in the pride of a father who has looked upon his children, and found them true to each other, and to him.

"What!" he said. "Have you proved it already — my son?"

THE END

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